

**Office of People Analytics (OPA)**



# **2017 Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Groups**

**Overview Report**

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# **2017 SERVICE ACADEMY GENDER RELATIONS FOCUS GROUPS**

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The lead analyst on this assessment was Amanda Barry of Fors Marsh Group. Jason Debus, Elizabeth Harper, W. Xav Klauberg, Natalie Namrow, and Hunter Peebles of Fors Marsh Group assisted in the preparation of this report. Laura Severance and Mallory Mann of Fors Marsh Group, Alisha Creel of Abt Associates, and Ashlea Klahr, Lisa Davis, and Kristin Williams of OPA assisted with the review of this report. Written transcripts of each of the sessions were provided by Gail Sherry and Jennifer Windham of Court Reporting, Inc. Policy officials contributing to the development of focus group content include: Dr. Nathan Galbreath and Anita Boyd (Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office); Samantha Ross (U.S. Military Academy); CAPT Raymond Marsh and LT Maureen Kane (U.S. Naval Academy); Daniel Lee (U.S. Air Force Academy); and Shannon Norenberg (U.S. Coast Guard Academy). We would like to thank all of the individuals at each Academy who assisted us in organizing the focus groups.

The data collection team consisted of Brock Brothers, Yvette Claros, Mike DiNicolantonio, Sam Evans, Emily Flores, Kinsey Gimbel, Kim Hylton, W. Xav Klauberg, Edward Pierce, Mallory Mann, and Amanda Barry of Fors Marsh Group.

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## Executive Summary

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The *2017 Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Groups (2017 SAGR)* study is an assessment conducted pursuant to the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, Section 532. The study is part of an assessment cycle at the Military Service Academies (MSAs) that started in 2005 and focuses on gender relations, including sexual assault and sexual harassment. The cycle alternates between a quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus groups) assessment. Surveys provide an assessment of progress over time and a broad understanding of the dynamics surrounding sexual assault and gender relations. Focus groups provide a more in-depth exploration of specific topics as well as an understanding of the climate at each Academy. These two efforts (surveys and focus groups) inform each other in an iterative manner. Combined, these assessments help Academy leaders and Service policy makers assess the effectiveness of programs and identify opportunities for improvement.

This report uses data from focus groups to explore the perception of issues related to sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-related topics at the Department of Defense (DoD) MSAs, including the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), and the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAF). Results for the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) are included in an appendix. Results provided in this report are qualitative in nature and cannot be generalized to the full population of MSA students. Themes should be considered the attitudes and opinions of focus group participants only and not the opinions of all MSA students, faculty, and staff.

## Focus Group Methodology

A total of 30 focus groups were conducted in the spring of 2017 with 188 cadets/midshipmen and 107 faculty and staff. Sessions were run by trained focus group moderators over 90 minutes in closed-door conference rooms or classrooms on each of the three Academy campuses.

Moderators led discussions covering topics related to general culture, perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment, factors affecting sexual assault (e.g., alcohol, bystander intervention), reporting and retaliation, and training and prevention. Using analytic induction, major themes were identified and coded into key categories.<sup>1</sup> Findings from the analysis are summarized and presented with supporting quotations throughout the report.

## Summary of Themes

The perspectives of the cadets and midshipmen as well as the faculty and staff are invaluable in assessing and understanding the policies and programs designed to address sexual assault and

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<sup>1</sup> To analyze and categorize topics, the qualitative data analysis software package, NVivo, was used to code language in the transcripts into thematic nodes. NVivo is a grouping and validation tool that provides comprehensive coverage of topics for summaries of findings. NVivo by QSR International Pty Ltd., Version 10, 2012 was used.

sexual harassment at the MSAs. Findings from the focus groups also highlight opportunities for improvement.

## General Culture

Participants were asked about general culture on campus, including questions about leadership, socializing, alcohol, peer communication, and the role of women at the Academy.

Leaders, as defined by participants, at the MSAs included Academy, military, and cadet/midshipmen leadership. Although student participants included many members of the Academy community in their definition of leadership, when asked who has the biggest influence on day-to-day life and mindset, the cadet/midshipmen leadership, seniors, and other peers were perceived to hold the most power by both students and faculty who participated in the focus groups. In order to gain cadet/midshipmen buy in, participants noted that it is important for students with social influence to also advocate for issues or show support. When discussing socializing at the Academies, student participants highlighted the small, tight-knit community and regimented lifestyle. Students often socialized within their company or squadron, classes, and athletic teams. Dating and relationships occurred, but it is within the policies and procedures set in place by the Academy. In addition, alcohol was seen as playing a large role in socializing and Academy life. Both student and faculty participants noted cadets/midshipmen did not always know how to drink responsibly, often leading to binge drinking.

Cadets and midshipmen who participated in the focus groups highlighted that news at the Academy travels fast, emphasizing that word of mouth was a key mode of communication, and this is exacerbated by the small size of the Academies. Student participants considered many forms of communication to fall under word of mouth, including face-to-face communication, texting, group chats, e-mail, and social media. Many students who participated in the focus groups across Academies referred to the “rumor mill” or news “spreading like wildfire,” leading to a perceived lack of privacy. Student participants also shared awareness of the need for a professional public image, leading many cadets and midshipmen to “self-police” content that appears on social media. More specifically, comments and content not deemed suitable for one’s public image would show up on private rather than public platforms.

Across all MSAs, the most prominent conversation among participants about women at the Academy involved physical standards or PT (Physical Training) scores. Cadets, midshipmen, and faculty who participated in the focus groups, by and large, voiced that women’s role in the military and right to attend the Academy was not in question. For most student participants, conversations about women in the Academy cropped up when there are sex-related policy changes or when discussing the physical standards set for women and men in their Service.

## Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

During each session, participants gave definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment, reviewed results from the 2016 SAGR survey, and discussed bystander intervention and other factors affecting sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Focus groups participants—both students and faculty—indicated cadets and midshipmen have an understanding of the definition of sexual assault, but were less confident in identifying behaviors that constitute sexual harassment.

At each Academy, reactions were mixed when reviewing the estimated prevalence rates from the 2016 SAGR survey.<sup>2</sup> However, when looking at results by class and gender, there were some common themes that were discussed across MSAs. Participants honed in on the comparatively low numbers of unwanted sexual contact (USC) for freshman and the relative “spike” sophomore year, citing that after students are recognized and removed from the isolation of freshman year, they are potentially vulnerable. Cadets, midshipmen, and faculty who participated in the focus groups also discussed the imbalance of females to males at the Academy; many indicated that they felt the lower number of female students was a factor in the number of reported USC incidents for females. When looking at the results for men at the Academies, students in the focus groups expressed that males were less likely to come forward, even on a survey, due to societal pressure and a stigma against male victims of sexual assault.

Views on bystander intervention were discussed across MSAs. Cadet and midshipman participants reported that they felt confident in how to handle a “black and white” situation but were less comfortable in the “gray area.” At each Academy, it was stated by students in the focus groups that if a cadet or midshipmen knew something was wrong, they would intervene. However, as the discussion continued, many said that often the situation was difficult to navigate and the right option was not always clear. It could get particularly unclear when individuals of a higher rank or strangers were a part of the scenario. Faculty participants did not express confidence in students’ ability to intervene in a situation where sexual assault might be about to occur.

When asked about other factors affecting sexual assault and sexual harassment, alcohol was discussed at length. The vast majority of participants articulated that most of the incidents of sexual assault that came to mind involved alcohol. Another factor that emerged from the focus groups was students’ close proximity to each other and the tight-knit community of the Academies, leading cadets or midshipmen to let “small things” go in an effort to keep people out of trouble or not rock the boat. However, some noted that these “small things” could escalate and, ultimately, lead to more serious harm.

## Reporting and Retaliation

Cadets, midshipmen, faculty, and staff who participated in the focus groups were shown the numbers of reports involving sexual assault allegations reported at that time and discussed reactions to restricted and unrestricted reports of sexual assault and complaints of sexual harassment. Participants were asked to identify barriers to reporting and the perceived prevalence of retaliation.

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<sup>2</sup> Students were shown data on the unwanted sexual contact (USC) prevalence rates by gender and class year for 2016, which included the percentage of participants who experienced more than one incident of USC and of those who experienced more than one incident, who had the same offender involved. MSA-specific chapters contain the survey results shown to students.

Although cadets and midshipmen in the focus groups expressed confidence in the reporting structure and options (restricted and unrestricted) for sexual assault and their ability to find official resources, some faculty participants were less confident in their knowledge and role in the system. Academic and athletic faculty in the sessions, in particular, were sometimes unclear if they qualified as a mandatory reporter or what was expected of them if a student were to disclose an experience of sexual assault.

When participants reviewed numbers of sexual assault and sexual harassment reports at their Academy from the academic year, many focused on the low numbers of sexual harassment complaints. Students and faculty in the sessions were unsurprised by the low number, stating that sexual harassment was often seen by students as something that should be handled at the cadet-to-cadet level or midshipmen-to-midshipmen level and not escalated. Many also voiced that cadets and midshipmen may not be able to recognize sexual harassment or know how to report it.

Participants identified a number of barriers to reporting, including fear of damaging one's reputation both at the Academy and later once they become officers, concerns about association with collateral misconduct such as alcohol or fraternization, and the lack of privacy and strenuous nature of the process. Students in the focus groups also feared retaliation, primarily in the form of ostracism. Many participants stated that in order to graduate, one needs the support of their peers. Isolation was seen as barrier to becoming an officer.

## **Training and Prevention**

Strategies for prevention and training around sexual assault and sexual harassment were a key focus of the discussion with cadets, midshipmen, faculty, and staff.

Although cadet and midshipman participants felt trainings thoroughly laid out definitions and explanations of the process for reporting, they expressed that training was often repetitive. Students and faculty in the focus groups noted that training was often met with negativity and frustration.

A number of opportunities for improvement were discussed in relation to training. Suggestions included relating training and examples to being an officer in their Service, an additional bystander intervention focus, and conducting groups in small discussion-based formats.

Cadets and midshipmen in the focus groups indicated that although most students would not be a perpetrator, many will be in a position to prevent a sexual assault or sexual harassment. Gearing training toward prevention would help them know what to do if that time comes.

Participants noted that for prevention and sexual assault and harassment messaging to be taken seriously, the support of cadets and midshipmen was essential to shaping thoughts and behaviors.

## **Synopsis**

The perspectives expressed in these groups are invaluable for assessing and understanding the dynamics surrounding sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-related issues at the MSAs. The ongoing program of alternating surveys and focus groups conducted at the



Academies will strive to inform the Department and Service Academy leadership regularly of issues associated with unwanted gender-related behaviors and to identify potential cultural and environmental factors that can be addressed to reduce these behaviors. The body of this report contains a wealth of information on these topics. Although this report alone cannot answer all questions about unwanted behaviors that are experienced by students at the Academies, it is a powerful source of insight from the students and faculty themselves that cannot be obtained otherwise.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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The Military Service Academies (MSA) strive to provide a safe environment for their students' educational and leadership development. Working with their Service Headquarters and the Department of Defense (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), the Academies have implemented programs to reduce sexual assault and sexual harassment while updating reporting and victim care procedures. A recurring evaluation of these programs through ongoing mixed-methods research (i.e., surveys and focus groups) informs the development of improvements to policies, procedures, and trainings aimed at reducing instances of sexual assault and sexual harassment and advancing care. Both focus groups and representative surveys are used to gain qualitative and quantitative feedback, respectively, from students and personnel at the Academies.

This report presents findings from the *2017 Service Academy Gender Relations Focus Groups (2017 SAGR)*, a source for exploring attitudes and directional evaluation of the gender relations environment at the Academies. This is the sixth administration of gender relations focus groups. This introductory chapter provides background on why these focus groups were conducted, a summary of recent DoD policies and programs associated with gender relations issues, a review of the methodology used to administer the focus groups, an overview of the report, and an introduction to key terms. References to perpetrator/offender throughout this report should be interpreted as “alleged perpetrator” or “alleged offender.” Without knowing the specific outcomes of particular allegations, the presumption of innocence applies unless there is an adjudication of guilt. References to “retaliation,” “reprisal,” “ostracism,” or “maltreatment,” or perceptions thereof are based on the negative behaviors as reported by the focus group participants; without knowing more about the specifics of particular cases or reports, this data should not be construed as substantiated allegations of reprisal, ostracism, or maltreatment. Therefore, no legal conclusions can be drawn on whether behaviors meet the definition of an offense having been committed.

## Study Background

The Health and Resilience (H&R) Division, within the Office of People Analytics<sup>3</sup> (OPA), has conducted congressionally mandated gender relations surveys and focus groups at the Academies since 2005.<sup>4</sup> Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.), Sections 4361, 6980, and 9361, as amended by Section 532 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2007, codified an assessment cycle at the Academies that consists of alternating surveys and focus groups. This requirement applies to the DoD Academies (U.S. Military Academy [USMA], U.S. Naval Academy [USNA], and U.S. Air Force Academy [USAFA]). Although not covered by the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2007 requirement, U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) leadership requested to be included, beginning in 2008, to evaluate and improve their programs

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<sup>3</sup> Before 2016, the H&R Division resided within the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). In 2016, DHRA reorganized and moved H&R under the newly established Office of People Analytics (OPA).

<sup>4</sup> The first assessment in this series was conducted in 2004 by the DoD Inspector General (IG). Details are reported in the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense (2005).

that address sexual assault and sexual harassment. Results from the data collection at USCGA can be found in Appendix A.

## DoD Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policies and Programs

This section provides a review of recent changes in DoD sexual assault and sexual harassment policies and programs, which were major topics covered in the 2017 SAGR focus groups.

### DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Policy

**Program Oversight.** In February 2004, the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD[P&R]) testified before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee on the prevalence of sexual assault in the DoD and the programs and policies planned to address this issue. In accordance with legislative requirements (Ronald W. Reagan NDAA for Fiscal Year 2005), USD(P&R) issued memoranda to the Services in November and December 2004. These documents provided DoD policy guidance on sexual assault that included a new standard definition, response capability, training requirements, response actions, and reporting guidance throughout the DoD. DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) supported implementation of this new policy and required a continual assessment of the prevalence of sexual assault in the DoD and the effectiveness of the programs and resources.

DoD refined and codified its policy on sexual assault prevention and response through a series of directives issued in late 2004 and early 2005. These policies were further revised in 2012, 2013, and 2015 by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and USD(P&R). DoD Directive (DoDD) 6495.01, “Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program,” was reissued in January 2012 and then updated again in April 2013 and January 2015 to implement DoD policy and assign responsibilities for the SAPR Program on prevention of and response to sexual assault as well as the oversight of these efforts. DoDD 6495.01 established a comprehensive DoD policy on the prevention of and response to sexual assault (Department of Defense, 2015b). The policy states:

*“The DoD goal is a culture free of sexual assault, through an environment of prevention, education and training, response capability (defined in Reference (c)), victim support, reporting procedures, and appropriate accountability that enhances the safety and well being of all persons covered by this Directive and Reference (c).”<sup>5</sup>*

In addition, this 2015 DoDD mandated standardized requirements and documents; an immediate, trained response capability at all permanent and deployed locations; effective awareness and prevention programs for the chain of command; and options for both restricted and unrestricted reporting of sexual assaults.<sup>6</sup> It also prohibited the enlistment or commissioning of people convicted of sexual assault.

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<sup>5</sup> “Reference (c)” is Department of Defense. (2008). Sexual assault prevention and response program procedures. (DoD Instruction 6495.02). Washington, DC.

<sup>6</sup> Restricted reporting allows a sexual assault victim to confidentially disclose the details of the assault to specified individuals and receive medical treatment and counseling without prompting an official investigation. Unrestricted reporting is for sexual assault victims who want medical treatment, counseling, command notification, and an official investigation of the assault.



Finally, DoDD 6495.01 charged the USD(P&R) with implementing the SAPR Program and monitoring compliance with the directive through data collection and performance metrics. It established SAPRO within the Office of the USD(P&R) to address all DoD sexual assault policy matters except criminal investigations and legal processes that are within the responsibility of the Offices of the Judge Advocates General of the Military Departments.

DoDD 6495.01 defines sexual assault as any “intentional sexual contact characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent” (Department of Defense, 2015). Under this definition, sexual assault includes rape, aggravated sexual contact, abusive sexual contact, forcible sodomy (forced oral or anal sex), or attempts to commit these acts. The directive states that sexual assault can occur without regard to gender, spousal relationship, or the age of the victim, and “consent” shall not be deemed or construed to mean the failure by the victim to offer physical resistance. DoDD 6495.01 defines “consent” as:

*“A freely given agreement to the conduct at issue by a competent person. An expression of lack of consent through words or conduct means there is no consent. Lack of verbal or physical resistance or submission resulting from the use of force, threat of force, or placing another person in fear does not constitute consent. A current or previous dating or social or sexual relationship by itself or the manner of dress of the person involved with the accused in the conduct at issue shall not constitute consent. A sleeping, unconscious, or incompetent person cannot consent” (Department of Defense, 2015b).*

***Uniform Code of Military Justice Provisions Regarding Sexual Assault.*** In Section 522 of the NDAA for FY 2006, Congress amended the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) to consolidate and reorganize the array of military sex offenses. These revised provisions took effect October 1, 2007. The most recent version of the UCMJ is dated 2013.

As amended, Article 120, UCMJ, “Rape, Sexual Assault, and Other Sexual Misconduct,” defines rape as being committed when “Any person subject to this chapter...commits a sexual act upon another person by—(1) using unlawful force against that other person; (2) using force causing or likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm to any person; (3) threatening or placing that other person in fear that any person will be subjected to death, grievous bodily harm, or kidnapping; (4) first rendering that other person unconscious; or (5) administering to that other person by force or threat of force, or without the knowledge or consent of that person, a drug, intoxicant, or other similar substance and thereby substantially impairing the ability of that other person to appraise or control conduct” (Title 10 U.S.C Section 920, Article 120). Article 120 of the UCMJ defines “consent” as “a freely given agreement to the conduct at issue by a competent person.” The term is further explained as:

- *“An expression of lack of consent through words or conduct means there is no consent.*
- *Lack of verbal or physical resistance or submission resulting from the use of force, threat of force, or placing another person in fear does not constitute consent.*
- *A current or previous dating or social or sexual relationship by itself or the manner of dress of the person involved with the accused in the conduct at issue shall not constitute consent.*

- *A sleeping, unconscious, or incompetent person cannot consent.*
- *A person cannot consent to force causing or likely to cause death or grievous bodily harm or to being rendered unconscious.*
- *A person cannot consent while under threat or fear or under the circumstances described in subparagraph (C) or (D) of subsection (b)(1). Under the definition of sexual assault, these are (C) making fraudulent representation that the sexual act serves a professional purpose and (D) inducing a belief by any artifice, pretense, or concealment that the person is another person.*
- *Lack of consent may be inferred based on the circumstances of the offense. All the surrounding circumstances are to be considered in determining whether a person gave consent, or whether a person did not resist or ceased to resist only because of another person's actions."*

**Professional Staff.** DoDD 6495.01 also defines the roles and responsibilities of personnel who implement the SAPR Program at DoD installations and deployed locations. The Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) serves as the central point of contact to oversee sexual assault awareness, prevention and response training, and the care of military members who have experienced a sexual assault. Victims' Advocates (VA) or Uniformed Victims' Advocates (UVA) report to the SARC and facilitate care for these military members by providing liaison assistance. Health Care Providers (HCP) offer health care services to military members who have experienced sexual assault.

### **DoD Equal Opportunity Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination Policies**

**Program Oversight.** The Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity (ODMEO) is the primary office within DoD that sets and oversees equal opportunity policies. ODMEO monitors the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and gender discrimination. The overall goal is to provide an "environment in which Service members are ensured an opportunity to rise to the highest level of responsibility possible in the military profession, dependent only on merit, fitness, and capability" (DoDD 1350.2).

**DoD Directives for Equal Opportunity Policy.** The DoD's definition of military sexual harassment was defined in 1995 and refined in 2015 in DoDD 1350.2 as:

*"A form of sex discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:*

- *Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person's job, pay, or career, or*
- *Submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person, or*
- *Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.*

- *This definition emphasizes that workplace conduct, to be actionable as ‘abusive work environment’ harassment, need not result in concrete psychological harm to the victim, but rather need only be so severe or pervasive that a reasonable person would perceive, and the victim does perceive, the work environment as hostile or offensive” (Department of Defense, 2015c).<sup>7</sup>*

## Methodology

OPA conducted 30 focus groups<sup>8</sup> on gender relations with cadets, midshipmen, faculty, and staff across all Academies from March 20, 2017, to April 21, 2017. Each group was conducted in 90-minute sessions with a moderator trained in sensitive topic facilitation. In total, 188 Academy students and 107 faculty, coaches and activity leaders, and military cadre participated in the groups. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary.

The focus group guide for each Academy was broken into four sections: *Academy Culture, Perceptions of Perceived Sexual Assault and Perceived Sexual Harassment, Reporting and Retaliation, and Training and Prevention.*

Although the results cannot be generalized to the population of the Service Academies, they provide insights into issues and ideas for further consideration. Data collection was discussion based and, therefore, although many subjects are addressed, not all questions were asked in all groups and not all participants were able to answer each question. Procedures for selecting participants, developing the questions, conducting the groups, and analyzing the data are described below. The focus group procedures were reviewed by a DoD Human Subjects Protection Officer as part of the DoD survey approval and licensing process.

## Participants

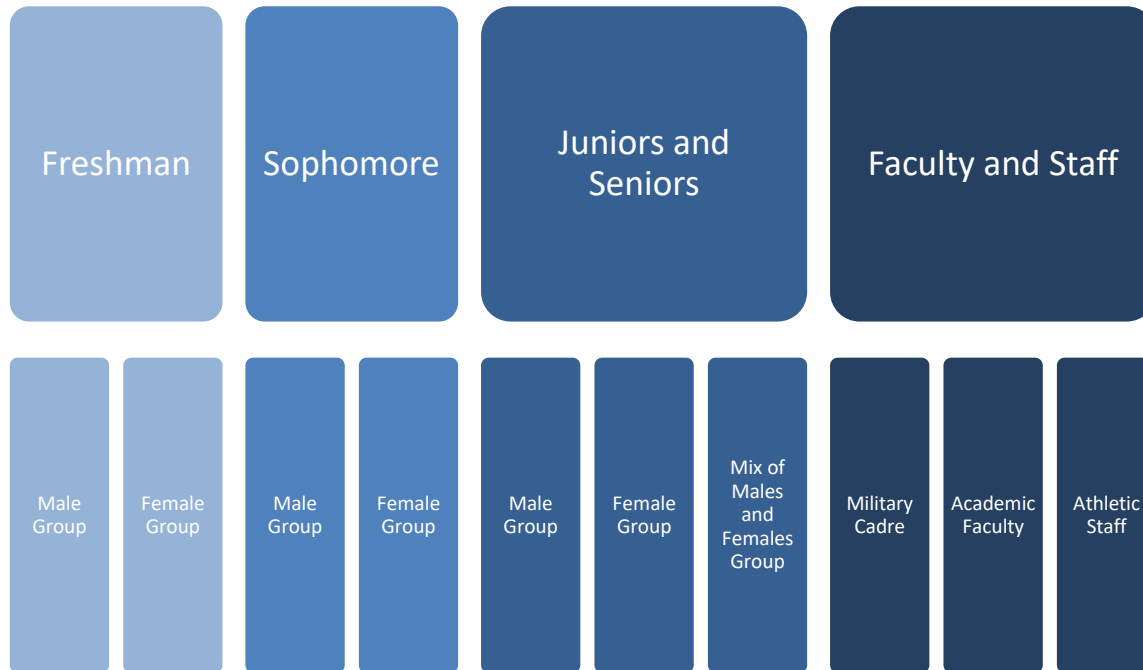
Study participants were selected from the general population at each Academy and may or may not have direct experience with sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Those who were selected and volunteered were recruited to participate in one of 10 groups—seven student and three faculty groups—held at each of the Academies. Student groups were broken out by gender and class year. Juniors and seniors were combined by gender, and juniors and seniors also participated in one mixed-gender group. Faculty groups were split by academic, athletic, and military cadre. See Figure 1 for a detailed layout of the groups that were conducted.

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<sup>7</sup> OPA used the DoD definition of sexual harassment at the time the groups were conducted.

<sup>8</sup> Nine groups were conducted at USCGA. Details can be found in Appendix A.

**Figure 1.**  
*Group Composition Layout*



Participants were recruited via e-mail. To select participants for student groups, each Service Academy supplied OPA with a roster of all cadets/midshipmen. After randomizing each list within clusters defined by gender and class year, rosters were returned to each Academy. Each Service Academy was responsible for recruiting the first available 12 students to participate in the appropriate session with an even split of female and male cadets/midshipmen for the mixed gender group. Each Academy was required to emphasize that participation was voluntary, and participants were able to discontinue participation of the study at any time. For this reason, the size of sessions varied.

For the faculty sessions, Academy officials advertised the sessions through the most appropriate forum for their Academy and solicited volunteers. The breakout for each Academy can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
*Participants by Academy*

Academy	Date	Student Participants	Faculty Participants
U.S. Military Academy	4/10/2017–4/13/2017	67	33
U.S. Naval Academy	3/20/2017–3/23/2017	73	44
U.S. Air Force Academy	4/18/2017–4/21/2017	48	30

## Development of the Guide

Using findings from the *2016 Service Academy Gender Relations Survey (2016 SAGR)* and topics of interest identified during its release, OPA analysts created the initial draft of focus group protocol. Working with SAPRO and each Academy, OPA incorporated collaborative feedback before finalizing the focus group guide. The guide was broken into four parts:

1. Academy Culture
2. Perceptions of Perceived Sexual Assault and Perceived Sexual Harassment
3. Reporting and Retaliation
4. Training and Prevention

Each section covered multiple related topics, including questions on leadership, socializing, bystander intervention, and barriers to reporting. The student and faculty guides can be found in Appendix C and D, respectively.

## Conducting the Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted on site at each Academy in closed-door conference rooms or classrooms. Facilitators who were trained in focus group moderation and sensitive topics led the sessions. Gender-specific groups were led by facilitators of the same gender (i.e., male groups were led by a male facilitator, female groups were led by a female facilitator). For mixed-gender groups, the facilitator was either male or female. Focus group sessions were recorded using a stenographer.

Participants were provided with handouts to supplement the guided conversation. Student and faculty handouts can be found in Appendices E and F.

## Analysis

Data from the focus groups were analyzed using analytic induction,<sup>9</sup> a six-step method. First the data were organized by Academy, removing any personally identifiable information (PII) or other identifying information. Next, using qualitative analysis software (NVivo), the team coded data into key themes. All transcripts were coded and verified by two analysts to avoid individual bias. After coding was completed, analysts developed assertions that stated possible findings. Then, researchers compiled data that supported or contradicted each assertion. Once the data were compiled for each assertion, researchers determined whether to keep, revise, or eliminate the findings based on the support and contradictions for the assertion. Assertions are

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<sup>9</sup> Erikson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, (3rd ed., pp.119–161).

summarized in the subsequent chapters of this report. Quotes that exemplify key findings reached through the analytic induction process are included throughout the report.<sup>10</sup>

Findings for each Academy are presented in separate chapters:

- Chapter 2 provides a summary of findings from the U.S. Military Academy.
- Chapter 3 provides a summary of findings from the U.S. Naval Academy.
- Chapter 4 provides a summary of findings from the U.S. Air Force Academy.
- Chapter 5 provides a discussion of major themes from across the Military Service Academies.

## Terminology

For the purposes of this report beliefs and opinions attributed to “student,” “faculty,” “cadet,” or “midshipmen” refer to participants in the 2017 SAGR focus groups. Throughout the report, terms such as “offender,” “perpetrator,” or “victim” are not intended to convey any presumption concerning sexual assault allegations. Use of the phrases “sexual assault” or “sexual harassment” does not imply that actions met the burden of proof otherwise obtained by an investigation under the Uniform Code of Justice (UCMJ).

***Unwanted Sexual Contact.*** As a part of the 2017 SAGR focus group effort, participants were shown results from parts of the 2016 SAGR survey, including a measure of unwanted sexual contact (USC). USC is intended to serve as a proxy for sexual assault and refers to a range of activities prohibited by UCMJ, including unwelcome or uninvited completed or attempted sexual intercourse, sodomy (oral or anal sex), penetration by an object, and unwanted touching of genitalia and other sexually related areas of the body.<sup>11</sup> In each chapter, the section “Survey Results” discusses results from the 2016 SAGR survey, focusing on participant reactions to rates of USC.

***Class Year.*** For the purposes of this report, student class years are referred to as freshmen, sophomores, upperclassmen (junior and senior), or underclassmen (freshman and sophomore). Within participant quotations, class years may be referred to, in corresponding order, as fourth class, third class, second class, and first class.

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<sup>10</sup> For clarity throughout the report, filler words (e.g., “like,” “um,” “you know,” “yeah”) were removed from quotations, and explicit words are indicated by [explicit] where they were removed. Attribution of quotes include gender when available; when gender is not available attribution designates class or faculty.

<sup>11</sup> For more information regarding construction of the USC measure and how it differs from sexual assault measures used on other OPA gender relations surveys with military populations, see the 2016 Service Academy Gender Relations Survey Overview Report (available: [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=SAGR1601\\_Final\\_3\\_3\\_17.pdf&groupName=pubGenderAcademy](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=SAGR1601_Final_3_3_17.pdf&groupName=pubGenderAcademy)).

***Glossary.*** Quotations are used throughout the report to highlight key themes and findings. Within quotations, participants may use slang and terminology that are specific to the military, their Service, or their Academy. Please use the glossary in Appendix B as a guide.





## Chapter 2: U.S. Military Academy

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A total of ten 90-minute focus groups were conducted at the United States Military Academy (USMA) between April 10 and April 13, 2017. Seven of the 10 groups were comprised of cadets and the remaining three were made up of faculty members. These focus groups included 67 cadets and 33 faculty members.

### General Culture

USMA is located in West Point, NY, in what participants perceived to be a relatively isolated location with restricted access. USMA was the first U.S. Military Service Academy and participants expressed a deep sense of pride in the institution. This has led to a strong emphasis on tradition at the Academy, fostering a deep connection to USMA for many. Given its status as the oldest Military Service Academy, USMA participants often felt as if they were under a microscope and would be scrutinized more than other Academies. They felt pressure to set a good example and act as the face of all the U.S. Military Service Academies. Another defining feature of Academy culture was the isolation that students felt from the broader community. Heavy demands on participants' time and a strictly regimented schedule have led to an insular campus culture. However, participants also attributed the close-knit nature of the campus community to this very isolation. Some indicated this isolation encouraged them to bond with one another, specifically persons in their companies, sports teams, or clubs. As a result, cliques could form and attitudes and reputations could persist even after graduation. This culture contributed to a fear of sticking out in any manner and made cadet participants more likely to self-police.

### Leadership

When asked to discuss who they viewed as leaders on campus, participants generally first responded with faculty members or members of the military cadre. Faculty, such as coaches and company command, were seen as the most influential members of the permanent party at USMA. However, many student participants then went on to discuss cadet leadership. It seemed that although cadet participants viewed traditional Academy leadership as influential, peer leadership was particularly influential on cadets' day-to-day attitudes. Underclassmen participants, especially freshmen, looked to the upperclassmen cadets to set the tone on campus and to lead. Cadet participants seemed to look to leaders with whom they interacted more frequently.

*"...In the end it's your lower level leaders, even just upper-class cadets and your TAC team, who are the captain, the TAC NCO, that you can really learn from and draw from. Those are the people that you interact with quite a bit."*

**– Upperclassman, Male**

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## **Campus Communication**

Participants were asked to discuss how leadership communicated to the student body most frequently.

Student participants indicated cadets communicated with each other in many different ways. Facebook was often used for communication about classwork and for class-wide announcements, as well as socializing. Group and individual text messages were often used for socializing and personal communication, whereas e-mail was used for both socializing and official communications. Applications like Snapchat were also used to send pictures to other cadets.

The most prominent ways in which faculty participants communicated with cadets were via e-mail, text messages, and face-to-face meetings. The morning and lunch formations were viewed as effective ways to quickly get information to many cadets at once. E-mail and text messages were used as supplementary communication methods, and face-to-face meetings were used for longer, more involved or in-depth communication, usually with smaller numbers of cadets.

*“One of the approaches is the formation, the morning formation, stuff gets put out really quickly, then lunch formation, stuff gets put out really quickly. ...In between, text messages, e-mailing, and if need be a longer conversation where they set up a meeting.” – Faculty, Male*

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## **Leadership’s Attitude Toward Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy**

Participants said they felt the Superintendent took sexual assault and sexual harassment quite seriously and had made these topics, along with gender relations, a priority at USMA. Additionally, the general attitude is the Army had taken a more serious approach to sexual assault and sexual harassment and was pushing to change the culture with respect to gender relations. Cadet participants noted they were required to take trainings and participate in discussions regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment. The prevailing attitude from the higher ranking leadership and the Army in general seemed to be that sexual assault and sexual harassment are a problem to be fixed as soon as possible. However, participants in the focus groups reported some members of cadet leadership did not take trainings or briefings on these issues seriously, often making fun of them or expressing annoyance when required to attend them. Despite this, participants indicated the overwhelming majority of leadership seemed to present a united front in tackling the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*“So, in terms of gender relations and everything, sexual assault and prevention is something that’s important to [the Superintendent], so it’s become important to the Academy.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## **Social Aspects of Academy Life**

Participants were asked to discuss socializing on campus. Participants generally reported socialization at USMA was more limited or restricted than it would be on a civilian campus. Friend groups often revolved around a cadet’s company and rarely strayed outside of it. Furthermore, socializing typically involved other duties, such as completing homework or

participating in sports. These duties left little time for more informal socialization and caused cadet participants to report feeling rushed in their social life.

Participants reported campus policies on socialization contributed to these situations. Students in the focus groups identified a number of social policies that impacted campus life. Freshmen at USMA were not allowed to speak to upperclassmen outside of sports teams and official business until a set time. Furthermore, interactions between cadets should be professional at all times, and public displays of affection were forbidden. With the exception of roommates, cadets were barred from being in dorm rooms alone together, regardless of the sex of the cadets. These policies were reported to greatly influence campus culture, even if cadets violate them.

*“Because of the time demands here, a lot of socializing comes in with our work schedule. So we do sports together, we’re traveling as a team of cadets. Or we’re going to gym together or studying together. Or we’re doing something work related together. And that’s how we socialize.”*

– **Sophomore, Male**

*“So, the rules literally state that you cannot have anything more than a professional relationship with an upperclassman. So that means you can’t add them as a friend on Facebook ... Obviously you can’t date them. Obviously there are those that break those rules. And that they came up with [the rules] to mimic how in the regular army.”* – **Freshman, Female**

## **Alcohol**

Alcohol was seen as playing a large role in Academy culture and was often thought of as a problem on campus.

**Policy.** The official alcohol policy of USMA prohibited alcohol in the barracks or in cadet areas. Additionally, freshmen were not allowed to have alcohol, regardless of their age. Sophomores of drinking age may drink, but not at the on-campus facilities that served alcohol. Finally, juniors and seniors who were of age drink may drink at the on-campus facilities that served alcohol.

Cadets who wanted to drink on campus must go through the “21st Birthday Training,” which taught students about the effects of alcohol by allowing them to drink in a controlled environment. Participants seemed to think this training was an effective introduction to alcohol, but noted more could be done to shape campus alcohol culture.

*“Even to the point—we do 21st birthday training here at the Academy. So they have cadets come down to the Firstie Club and drink like four beers in a couple hours and, you know, have them understand what it feels like to be drunk, and do a breathalyzer. And that’s for in order to drink on post they had to have gone through that training part.”* – **Faculty, Male**

**Alcohol Usage.** Student and faculty participants reported that binge drinking was common at USMA. With so little time for socializing, students felt they must fit as much drinking into free

time as possible. Cadet participants reported drinking did not occur much during the week because of students' workload, but free time tended to focus largely on alcohol consumption. Some indicated that they believed campus culture was a contributing factor to this and suggested regular opportunities to consume alcohol would lower the instances of binge drinking. Cadets in the focus groups also asserted that alcohol may be more of a problem for freshman than upperclassmen. Freshmen may be monitored more closely and more restricted in their daily activities, leading to a desire to take advantage of free time and to "let go" by drinking. Upperclassmen, on the other hand, had more freedom and fewer restrictions and may feel less pressure or need to unwind through the use of alcohol.

*"[Alcohol] plays a huge role. And cadets only have certain amounts of time, a limited amount of time they can to drink alcohol...So what you see is cadets, when they are able to drink, going to a certain extreme, where they end up drinking too much alcohol when they probably normally wouldn't do that, if they had more options to do it."* – **Faculty, Male**

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**Weekends.** Weekends at USMA were the main time for socializing and when cadets had the most free time. Football games and tailgates were two of the most popular weekend activities according to participants. Additionally, special events, such as dances or balls, occurred on the weekends. Weekends were also seen as the time when the most alcohol consumption occurred. Upperclassmen were able to go to bars and go off campus. However, some cadet participants reported that they felt they simply did not have enough time to drink in excess on the weekends. They reported their schoolwork and other duties or obligations took up too much time, and they would never be able to keep up if they drank too much on the weekend.

**On versus Off Campus.** Participants responded that going off campus was associated with increased alcohol consumption. Large events, such as away Army–Navy football games, motivated students to go to off-campus venues in large numbers. Students at these events were highly likely to consume alcohol because they did not have their normal on-campus duties and felt they could relax more than they would on campus. Additionally, participants described how cadets would frequently go to New York City to go to bars. Students in the focus groups said they felt that these off-campus excursions could create dangerous situations in which cadets would be intoxicated in unfamiliar areas.

*"Cadets are binge drinkers because [they] get out for the weekends."*  
– **Freshman, Female**

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## Women on Campus

Conversations surrounding women in the military and in Service Academies were varied. Faculty participants focused on how the culture had become more accepting of females, whereas student participants focused on how women were not as welcome as men as cadets at USMA. Faculty in the focus groups reported military culture as a whole was more inclusive of women, whereas in the past, it was socially acceptable to openly disparage women's involvement in the military. Despite this progress, cadet participants still felt like gender relations at USMA could

be improved. Students in the sessions reported opinions behind closed doors could be quite different than in public, and women were often stigmatized.

Men far outnumber women at USMA. Women participants reported that they were treated differently because there was a lower percentage of women than men and suggested that having more women on campus would help to alleviate this issue. Female cadet participants stated that they believed they were in a male-dominated field, and many of their peers simply could not empathize with them. For example, victims of sexual assault or sexual harassment were sometimes made fun of or joked about because they would become more nervous and act differently around campus. This spoke to an insensitivity surrounding the topic of sexual assault and sexual harassment and could create a barrier to reporting for victims. Participants said they believed that as more women were integrated into campus life, these issues should improve, but there was a lot of room for improvement.

A particular topic of interest to cadet participants was physical fitness standards, which differed for women and men at USMA. There was some disagreement regarding how the physical standards were applied, but it was agreed upon that the current application was insufficient. There was a large disparity in the physical standards for men and women, and both male and female participants tended to agree that women's standards were low in comparison to men's standards. Female cadet participants reported that many of their accomplishments were looked down upon due to the difference in physical standards, and they were made to feel "other" because of those standards.

*"I mean women are just as capable as men, but it's not necessarily seen that way. And it doesn't really help when there aren't that many of us in the first place."* – **Sophomore, Female**

*"Anytime a female does well or is a combat female, you always hear that one type of guy who's always like the female standards are such a joke..."*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

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## Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

### Definitions

Participants were asked about their familiarity with the definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

### **Sexual Assault**

Cadet and Faculty participants at USMA largely indicated that they perceived sexual assault as clearly defined, agreeing that physical contact was the point at which sexual assault occurred, although some faculty participants stated that they believed the definitions of rape, sexual assault, and unwanted sexual contact (USC) were too nuanced for some young cadets to fully understand. The majority of cadet participants reported that they felt confident in their ability to define and recognize sexual assault, with some crediting their confidence to the training provided at the Academy, whereas others felt the concept is common sense.

## Sexual Harassment

In contrast to sexual assault, most student participants and some faculty participants indicated that they felt less able to accurately recognize sexual harassment primarily due to its more subjective definition. Although sexual assault was viewed as objective “physical contact,” sexual harassment was viewed as how an individual perceives a particular behavior, including physical, verbal, and nonverbal behaviors. Participants indicated that this was especially true of cadets who have not realized their speech or actions could be perceived as offensive. Conversely, participants also indicated that some cadets may have been comfortable with behaviors that others may perceive as offensive, creating confusion among potential bystanders as to whether sexual harassment was actually occurring.

*“I’m more unclear on the definitions of sexual harassment than I am sexual assault. And I think that probably somewhere I think that would play into the prevention, too. If they’re not sure what it is, then how do they know to step in and help?” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“And I know [my friend touching my leg with his was] nothing, that’s just my friend being him... I had somebody else walk up to me, and they’re like... [he] was really getting close over there, what do you think, did that make you uncomfortable’ or whatever. And, I was like ‘No, that was just my friend being him, that’s what he does.’ But she could have perceived that in a way that maybe that was [uncomfortable].” – Freshman, Female*

## General Perceptions

Participants were asked their general perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy, covering topics such as overall awareness and change over time. Two elements that were discussed in the focus groups were the Academy’s Cadets Against Sexual Harassment and Assault (CASHA) program and Denim Day.<sup>12</sup> Faculty participants indicated the amount of resources provided to cadets who choose to report was better than in the past.

Cadet participants’ opinions of CASHA were mixed; many indicated that they felt the trainings provided by CASHA members were of poor quality, but others indicated that the quality of training greatly depended on the skill and experience of the individual facilitator. CASHA members felt they received good training on how to deal with individuals who have experienced sexual assault and/or sexual harassment and indicated that other cadets felt they could trust CASHA members. A recent example of a CASHA-coordinated awareness campaign was Denim Day. Denim Day was mostly popular among the student body and faculty and was successful in spreading awareness of sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Faculty participants did not indicate any obvious change over time regarding the frequency of sexual assault but did note cadet attitudes seemed to be less tolerant of sexual harassment than in the past.

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<sup>12</sup> Denim Day is an annual, nationally organized campaign to “protest against erroneous and destructive attitudes about sexual assault,” (About Denim Day, 2017). USMA’s 2017 participation was the first time in its history where cadets were allowed to wear jeans on campus.

*“I think Denim Day yesterday was a huge movement in the right direction. It was a cadet-generated idea, you know. And the Academy said, ‘Why not?’ And so we implemented it. So to me... it’s an entry point for that conversation [on sexual assault and/or sexual harassment].”*

– **Faculty, Male**

Being accused of a SHARP violation (called being “SHARP’d” among student and faculty participants) was a cause for fear for cadets in the focus groups, especially males, leading many to avoid or fear interacting with female cadets. Cadet participants feared being punished for innocuous comments or actions that could be misunderstood or found offensive by others, such as compliments or accidental physical contact during training in close quarters. Male participants attributed this fear to the irrelevance of intent in SHARP cases. Cadet participants were especially fearful of interacting with a cadet who had made a previous report because they feared being reported on as well. Student participants feared that investigations from a SHARP case could disrupt their already busy schedule, potentially affecting their classes, grades, and career (even if unsubstantiated).

*“At swimming, the swimming lanes are crowded, and just the other day accidentally, doing the back stroke you don’t see where exactly you’re going, but so I swiped a female cadet and I’m like ‘Whoa, I’m absolutely so sorry, I had no intent, I didn’t mean anything of it.’ And she was like ‘Oh, yeah, I get it, it’s no problem.’ You have this fear that they’re immediately going to SHARP you or something like that. And yeah, so—even the slightest touch you’re just like ‘Oh, I don’t want to be SHARP’d.’”* – **Sophomore, Male**

## **Sexual Assault**

The Academy enjoyed a growing and generally healthy awareness of sexual assault, especially because of cadet-sponsored programs like Denim Day and the Superintendent’s identification of sexual assault as a priority. The Academy’s 2017 Denim Day, coordinated by CASHA, was seen by many participants as generally successful in spreading awareness of sexual assault. Although most cadet participants indicated informal discussions on sexual assault were rare, Denim Day was perceived as an effective tool to promote conversation on the topic. Further, the Superintendent’s identification of sexual assault as a priority for the Academy meant the Superintendent’s immediate resources would be directed toward prevention and training and that sexual assault was a priority for every leader at the Academy. Some cadet participants acknowledged sexual assault as a problem for the school, but claimed it was nowhere as serious as at civilian universities, because they felt they were held to higher standards than the average college student.

*“[Sexual assault is] one of the Superintendent’s priorities. So that alone, it’s got the backing of a three star general, which is the equivalent of I would say maybe a CEO on the civilian side... the Superintendent has the ability to control, not just by words but by actions, control the environment, control the everything, and once it becomes one of his priorities, especially in the military culture where your priorities are driven by your next higher up. So*

*now it becomes every leader or every individual that in one way, form, or fashion can interact and influence a cadet, it's very much everybody's priority: the individuals that drive, that control, that resource, empower, educate.” – Faculty, Male*

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### **Sexual Harassment**

Awareness of sexual harassment at the Academy was also increasing, especially due to the Superintendent's identification of it as a priority. Despite the growing awareness of sexual harassment, many cadet participants indicated, because they found that sexual harassment was poorly defined, it was difficult for them to confidently identify it when it occurred. Faculty participants indicated that they perceived that most cadets seemed less tolerant of behaviors in line with sexual harassment than in the past.

*“One of the things that we are also getting better at is teaching people what sexual harassment and assault is, and people realize that ‘Oh, wait, that has happened to me.’ Before they might have been just ‘Oh... he just touched me a little bit weird’ or whatever. But now it's like... actually yeah, that's what it is. And so, now more people are like ‘Yes, I have had a problem with this.’” – Upperclassman, Male*

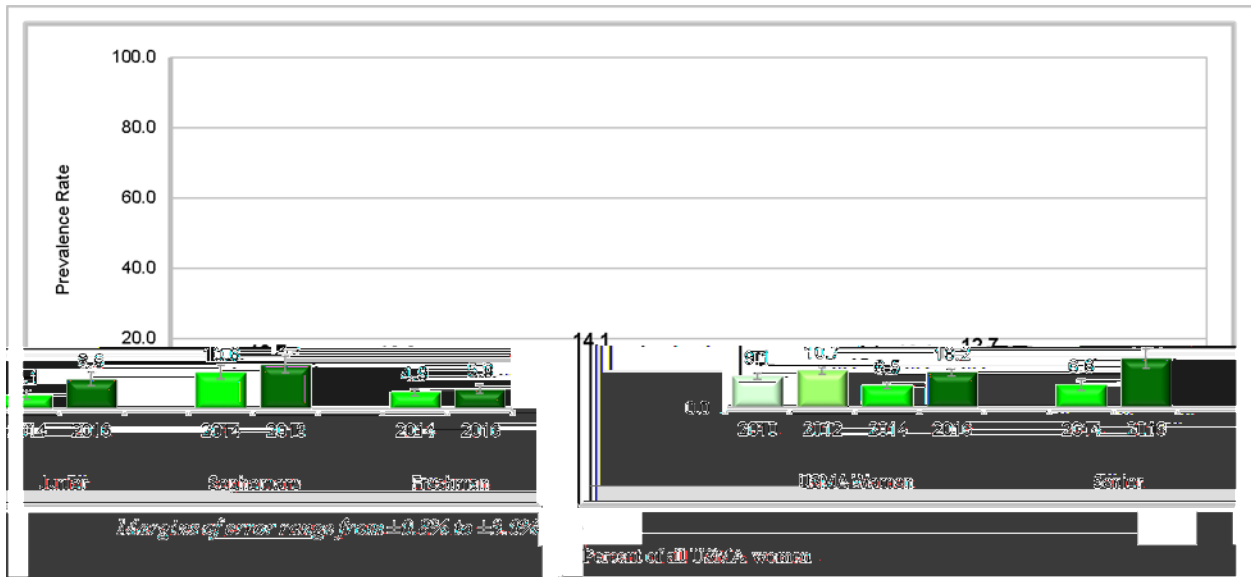
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### **Participants Perceptions on Survey Results from the 2016 SAGR**

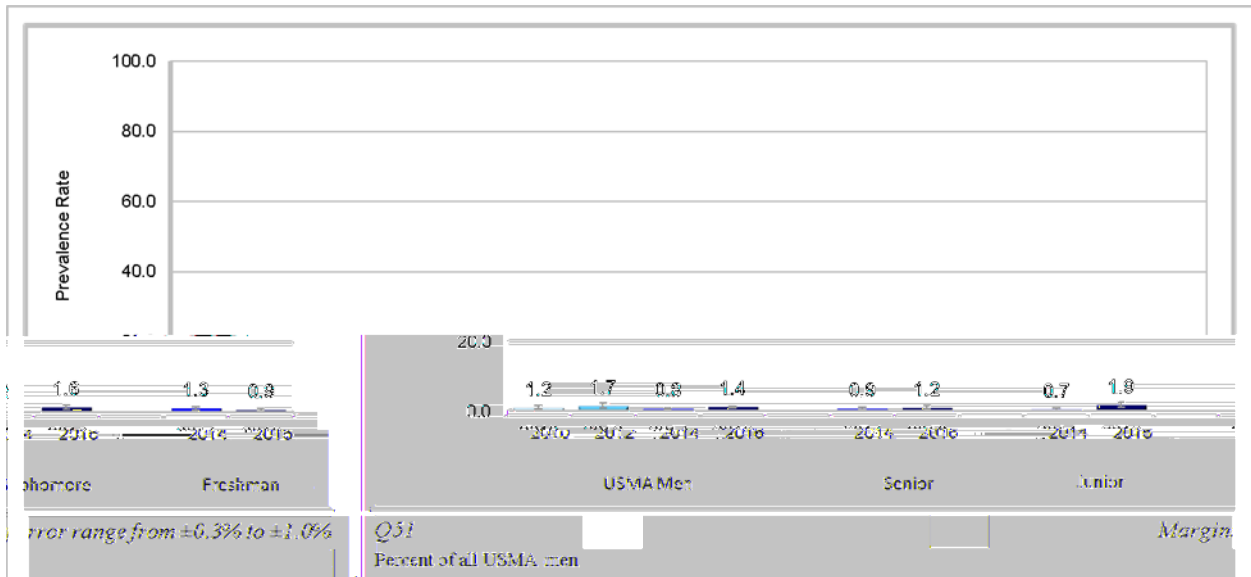
During the focus groups, the participants were shown data from the 2016 SAGR survey regarding the percentage of USMA cadets who indicated experiencing USC. These data were separated by gender and class and are illustrated in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.



**Figure 2.**  
*Percentage of USMA Women Who Indicated Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Contact, by Class Year and Survey Year*



**Figure 3.**  
*Percentage of USMA Men Who Indicated Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Contact, by Class Year and Survey Year*



**General Reactions**

Participants were generally not surprised by the data in the survey results by class year, attributing the low rate for freshmen to the Academy’s rules on fraternization, the spike in USC for sophomores to the fraternization rules being lifted, and upperclassmen’s higher rate to

increased freedoms that come with higher rank and age. The overall higher rate of experienced USC for female cadets was viewed partially as a consequence of the ratio of male to female cadets. There was no noteworthy discussion about why the rate increased in 2016 from 2014 among participants.

### **Class**

**Freshmen.** The vast majority of participants were not surprised by the relatively low degree of USC indicated by freshman cadets on the 2016 SAGR survey results. Cadet participants indicated that they perceived the Academy rules on fraternization to be the primary reason for this, as freshmen were not allowed to socially interact with cadets of any other class year until they became sophomores. In addition, freshmen's day-to-day activities were more structured and they had less free time than other cadets, which presented fewer opportunities for sexual assault to occur.

*“It’s definitely a difference between a Yuk and a Firstie, and I think that may be because like when you’re a Plebe, you’re like, you have leprosy, like no one is going to come near you. Or if they do, you know, it’s what people consider to be like a rare case...So nine times out of 10, I would say that most people are just going to make sure that there’s always that divide. Like if males come in the room, ‘Oh, let me put the trash can in the door, so people can walk by and see I’m not touching you.’” – Sophomore, Female*

**Sophomores.** The increase in USC for sophomores was immediately understood by participants as the result of lifted social restrictions on cadets as they become sophomores. One term commonly used among cadets and known to faculty is “Shark Week,” which was used to describe the period of time when freshmen cadets become sophomores and to illustrate the predatory nature of upperclassmen targeting new sophomores with romantic or sexual intentions. Some cadet participants claimed they knew of upperclassmen identifying certain freshmen very early in the school year as someone they would pursue during “Shark Week.” This phenomenon was exacerbated by the proportion of male cadets to female cadets: the relatively few new female sophomores were exposed to a sudden rush of social attention from upper-class cadets. Some cadet participants assumed sophomores would have the highest degree of USC and were relatively surprised to see female seniors indicated the highest degree of USC on the 2016 survey.

*“You can definitely tell that it’s a military academy in a sense, because there’s a huge spike sophomore year, and that makes complete sense to me because once the frat rule goes away and all... the upperclassmen try to date the now available sophomore females. So that definitely would make sense to me that there’s a huge spike that year.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“I’m not surprised by the plebe one or freshman one because we are isolated. I feel like the sophomore one is the one I would anticipate being the highest... because it’s called ‘Shark Week’ once you get recognized because there’s*

*so... few girls, the upperclassmen are like, 'Oh, we have a whole new pool of maybe two hundred girls that we can [pursue],'" – Freshman, Female*

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**Upperclassmen.** Participants indicated that they believed the high degree of USC among seniors was due to the greater freedom and privileges they have compared to underclassmen, such as available leave and the ability to legally consume alcohol, which many perceived to be a major risk factor for USC.

*"And then the other surge, when you're a Firstie, I think it's just because you're on your way out the door, you have an unlimited amount of freedoms, unlimited pass, and all of these different, I guess, I could say rewards that come with making it to the very end. So that leaves a lot of room for inappropriate behavior or things that happened that you weren't necessarily expecting." – Sophomore, Female*

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## Gender

**Female.** Most cadet participants indicated that they perceived the higher degree of experienced and reported sexual assault and sexual harassment for female cadets was a result of the disproportionate number of male cadets to females. According to participant reports, male cadets outnumber their female counterparts by roughly 3:1. Although this was viewed as one explanation of the higher rates for female cadets, it was not viewed as an excuse; participants asserted the ideal rate of USC is zero. This small proportion of female cadets was perceived as being more likely to be victimized because they were outnumbered by their male counterparts in a historically and culturally male-dominated environment.<sup>13</sup>

**Male.** Cadet and faculty participants both indicated that they perceived male cadets as highly likely to underreport USC for two interrelated reasons. First, they said they believed a large number of behaviors that were viewed as normal for male cadets at the Academy could be construed as USC, including many behaviors associated with “locker room behavior.” Examples of these behaviors included slapping another man on the buttocks in athletics or sports and “Naked Taps,” when cadets would disrobe during taps for the purpose of surprising or shocking the Company Duty Officer (CDO) who was conducting taps inspections of cadets’ rooms. Second, male victims were perceived to be less likely to report through official channels or on the survey because of the social stigmas associated with reporting sexual assault and/or sexual harassment for men.

*"It's a social stigma. It's about how we define masculinity. And men are not supposed to be vulnerable. If I'm a victim of a crime, then I'm vulnerable. I'm not likely to bring attention to that." – Faculty, Male*

*"I can't really imagine a lot of guys honestly shaming a guy for being sexually assaulted, but I can imagine a guy feeling... shame or reluctant to*

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that in institutions that have an approximately equal proportion of male and female students (e.g., civilian colleges), female students are still more likely to experience sexual assault (see <http://www.aau.edu/climate-survey.aspx?id=1625>).

*come forward that he wouldn't. So I would just speculate that it's not—it wouldn't be his peers, but it would be more like his personal feelings keeping him from coming forward, because I can only imagine guys here being very supportive.” – Upperclassman, Female*

### **Multiple Incidences**

Participants were also shown data from the 2016 SAGR survey regarding the topic of multiple incidents of USC and were asked what they thought the underlying reasons for multiple incidents of USC might be. These data are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

***Percentage of USMA Students Who Indicated Experiencing Multiple Incidents of Unwanted Sexual Contact and Indicated the Same Offenders Were Involved***

<b>Of those who experienced USC since June 2015:</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Experienced more than one incident	63%	58%
Same offenders were involved	50%	66%

Cadet participants indicated that multiple incidents of USC involving the same offender might indicate that the USC was occurring within a romantic relationship. Some cadet participants said they believed misunderstandings of relationship status between two individuals could lead to USC: possibly one cadet thinking their relationship with another cadet was more than it was, or one party of a broken-up couple not acknowledging the changes in the sexual aspect of their relationship. Many cadets in the focus groups surmised that hazing might be occurring in many of the multiple incidents of USC involving male victims.

*“It wouldn't be surprising if most of these incidences that happened were between people who had, like, previous relationships. Just because people assumed that...because they gave you consent before doesn't mean they'll give you consent now. But people like to twist that and turn that to mean like I mean I had sex with them once before so why wouldn't they give it to me now, and then it turns into something greater.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“I think what this would indicate is there's a relationship between two individuals that... has, perhaps, gone off and on, perhaps, one person has intentions for sexual relations and the other person doesn't. And I think that's probably where you probably see this dynamic.” – Faculty, Male*

*“The environments I think that we hit on before, where men are more likely to be assaulted by teammates, friends, whatever, and hazing or manly locker room type activity, I think that would be indicated by the fact that it's the same offender.” – Faculty, Male*

## Bystander Intervention

Cadet participants were ambivalent in their opinions about whether the average cadet would intervene when observing a situation in which sexual assault was likely to occur. The majority reported factors such as class year of the potential offender, a bystander's familiarity with the potential victim or offender, and situational ambiguity contributed to a bystander's decision to intervene.

One of the most influential elements for bystander intervention was the cadet chain of command. Many cadet participants reported they would be less likely to intervene in a situation in which the potential offender was an upperclassman for fear of professional reprisal such as filing a negative Cadet Observation Report (COR). Conversely, cadet participants reported that they would be more comfortable intervening in a situation if the potential offender were a cadet in a class below that of the bystander. Cadet participants generally felt a responsibility to correct an underclassman's behavior, including those related to potential sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Cadet participants indicated they would be less likely to intervene if they did not know the potential victim, the potential offender, or the relationship between the two, as they felt intervening would be intruding on others' personal business. Conversely, cadets in the focus groups also indicated they would be more likely to intervene if the potential victim or potential offender was an acquaintance or friend, either to protect them from being victimized or from victimizing others.

*“If it’s a problem with an upperclassman, if you say something, they could totally turn against you and be...negative, COR, you know, and they could make your life miserable by you stepping in. So, it’s like I don’t want to cross any boundaries, I guess.” – Freshman, Female*

*“One of my guy friends who was with me, he was like if anyone gives you problems, let me know... So if it was a friend thing...then that would happen. But if it was a stranger I feel like it would be less likely for them to intervene.” – Freshman, Female*

*“Personally I haven’t seen it on campus, I’ve never been a part of it, I’ve never witnessed someone being assaulted and harassed. But a cadet... [was]discussing Denim Day, which was two days ago, and he said that he was walking through Annapolis and it was late at night, on the streets, two college-age-looking individuals, a couple it looked like, were like getting into an alley and the guy pushed the girl against the wall and they started getting more physical. He confronted them, like, ‘Hey, what are you doing?’ And both of them played it off like, ‘It’s ok, bro,’ and the girl was like, ‘I’m fine, it’s all good.’ This was apparently normal. But like cadets will take initiative on that. It’s been demonstrated.” – Sophomore, Male*

## Role of Alcohol

Participants indicated that they perceived a strong association between alcohol and both sexual assault and sexual harassment. Cadet participants indicated the covert nature of underage drinking and the lack of a healthy way to learn how to use alcohol safely led many students to binge drink, which could make them more vulnerable to sexual assault. Many participants reported all or almost all cases of sexual assault and/or sexual harassment that they had heard of involved the use of alcohol. Some cadet participants reported offenders would purposefully use alcohol as a “date rape drug” to intoxicate and take advantage of potential victims. Others said they believed offenders would use the illicit presence of alcohol in an environment as leverage in committing sexual assault, believing others would be less likely to report the offense out of fear of being punished for being around alcohol and not reporting it. Finally, many cadet participants indicated how alcohol blurs perceived consent, particularly in cases when both parties are intoxicated.

*“[Alcohol plays] A tremendous amount [of a role]. I mean, I think statistically the number of sexual harassment, sexual assault cases that occur, I think the majority, I don’t have the specific numbers, but I know the majority of cases have occurred while cadets are intoxicated.”*

– **Faculty, Male**

*“I guess just if you were giving someone alcohol for the purpose of having sex, then clearly you’re making a poor choice. But by that token, it’s hard to tell when someone is being a jerk or disregarding or objectifying someone or when they are actually sexually assaulting them. And I think because those lines blur so easily, that’s where you get into a lot of victim-blaming that happens, and this impression that women will say one thing and then mean another, or regret the next morning and all of a sudden that equates to sexual assault. And those kinds of stereotypes here definitely take away a lot of the repete that our program to end sexual assault has.”*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

*“They had a video that people commonly quote about tea: you can’t make someone drink a tea if they’re unconscious. Then some of the SHARP cases become very ambiguous when they say both people are drunk. So it’s commonly—don’t shoot the messenger here—but if the female is drunk and the male is drunk, it’s the male’s fault for not getting sober consent for sexual interaction, whether the female who is drunk was avidly requesting sexual contact. But in the morning when they sober up, the male is generally the one who’s at fault in most SHARP cases.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

## Other Factors in Sexual Assault/Harassment

**Location.** The majority of participants reported that although sexual assault and sexual harassment were problems to be addressed at the Academy, most believed it largely occurred off campus. Student and faculty participants also claimed that although efforts could be made

toward minimizing sexual assault and/or sexual harassment at the Academy, situations involving cadets off campus were generally out of the school's hands. Cadet participants reported environments with alcohol were more likely to facilitate sexual assault and/or sexual harassment, such as the Army–Navy football game, being off campus at a party, port-call, or elsewhere.

*“And so, at last weekend’s Army–Navy game, or on our trip sections, whatever, I think there alcohol plays a significant role in sexual harassment and sexual assault. Which I mean follows general concepts of you get a bunch of people who are underage and irresponsible, get them all drunk, you throw them together, bad things happen. Mostly alcohol boards that I know of happen off West Point. Same thing for sexual harassment and sexual assault.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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## Reporting and Retaliation

### Familiarity with Reporting Options

Participants were asked if cadets on campus knew the difference between a restricted and unrestricted report. They were also asked if cadets knew who to report to for each type of report.

Participants responded that cadets were very familiar with the difference between restricted and unrestricted reports, as well as the sources available for reporting. Respondents said they felt training on reporting options was sufficient and cadets were highly familiar with their reporting options. Participants expressed satisfaction with the number of both restricted and unrestricted reporting sources and felt comfortable reporting to them. However, participants largely responded that they were not sure whether many sources fell under restricted or unrestricted sources.

#### **Restricted**

Participants responded that cadets on campus generally felt more comfortable with restricted reporting. Restricted reports would not necessitate a full investigation, making them much less intrusive than unrestricted reports. Further, the reporting process would be much less strenuous for restricted reports and would require less stress than an unrestricted report.

*“I think the restricted one is always going to be there, because having gone through that with cadets, they don’t want to go through the gauntlet I think of what transpires when it’s unrestricted.” – Faculty, Male*

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#### **Unrestricted**

Participants reported that more unrestricted reporting on campus was desirable; however, it would be more intrusive for the victim, as it would symbolically tell the campus that the reporter had nothing to hide and wanted to do everything out in the open. Cadets in the focus groups expressed it felt less “sneaky” than restricted reporting.

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*“Unrestricted...seems like it’s definitely less confidential, but it’s a bit more like, I have nothing to hide.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## Trust in the Reporting Process

Trust was considered by focus group participants to be an integral part of the reporting process and a major factor in cadets’ decision to report and to whom to report. Participants responded that cadets were more likely to report if they trusted the person to whom they were reporting. In addition, a pre-existing relationship with reporting staff was seen as a more attractive and safer option than reporting to staff who are unfamiliar. Reporting cadets would want to be sure that whomever they go to would take their report seriously and in a manner that drew as little attention as possible from the rest of campus. Participants stated that cadets were reluctant to go through the formal chain of command, but would be more likely to report to coaches or mentors.

*“I think cadets would [be] more likely go to coaches than—than a civilian or a mentor—than their actual formal chain of command because of the process. And I think that happened only because they have a great relationship with staff and it all came together. But I do think, you know, cadets are very reluctant to go to their formal chain of command...So they’ll come to somebody they trust first.” – Faculty, Male*

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## Student Groups

Cadets Against Sexual Harassment and Assault (CASHA) was a student group at USMA that focused on education and prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment and student participants believed was also available as a reporting resource. Participants’ opinions of CASHA were generally very positive. CASHA gave cadets a more prominent voice with the administration, and CASHA members were frequently seen as leaders on campus. CASHA representatives were also available as a restricted reporting source. Since the group existed outside of the normal chain of command and reports made to CASHA members were not required to be made public, cadet participants felt more comfortable using CASHA as a reporting source than others available on campus. CASHA would frequently provide student services or host events on campus, and these were generally met with enthusiasm or appreciation. Recent examples included Denim Day, in which students were allowed to wear jeans on campus in an effort to raise awareness about sexual assault and sexual harassment, and providing a designated driver program to students after events at which students might be drinking. CASHA was seen by many student participants as an indication that the administration and USMA in general were taking sexual assault and sexual harassment seriously.

The major criticisms regarding CASHA from focus group participants focused on the training it provided to students. Many of these trainings were mandatory, and some cadet participants reported that trainings were not engaging or relevant to them. Additionally, some cadet participants reported that they felt CASHA trainings promoted gender stereotypes, referring to men as rapists and women as victims, and found this very off-putting. Others reported having students as the face of an organization focused on such serious subject matter made it easy to not



take it seriously. This became especially prevalent during CASHA trainings, when many cadets made fun of the subject matter or generally act out.

*“I feel like I’ve had really good experiences with my CASHA briefings, just because it starts really good conversations.” – Freshman, Female*

*“People are scared of going to CASHA and SHARP and talking about it, or they’re scared that they’re going to be blamed falsely. Or they make it as a joke or ‘Oh, that doesn’t happen on our campus.’ And I think partially that’s just because some aren’t mature enough to handle the content. But the exposure needs to happen.” – Sophomore, Female*

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## Reactions to Reporting

Participants were presented with data describing the number of reported incidences of sexual assault and sexual harassment for the current school year. SAPRO’s annual report on the MSAs showed that reports for USMA total 50 (29 unrestricted and 21 restricted). At the time of data collection, official reports of sexual harassment were less than five for all MSAs.

When presented with the data, participants’ reactions ranged from frustration that the number of sexual assault reports was so high to optimism that more cadets have reported incidents of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Respondents stated that seeing a higher number of unrestricted reports than restricted reports was a step in the right direction and suggested the stigma for reporting might be slowly phasing out of Academy culture. Other participants theorized the reason for so few sexual harassment reports might be explained by cadets not taking a sexual harassment offense seriously and thinking it was not worthy of reporting. Participants generally reported that the Academy was moving in the right direction when examining reports from the previous school year.

*“I think that the fact that there’s significantly more unrestricted reports than restricted, I think it does go back to that idea of, you know, the corps is now adapting that mentality it is good, it is encouraged to speak up about any form of sexual assault or harassment.” – Freshman, Male*

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## Barriers to Reporting

Although cadet participants said they knew how to report, they also felt there were many reasons why a student would not come forward and go through the formal or informal reporting process. These barriers ranged from fear of retaliation to lack of privacy to concerns regarding one’s career prospects.

### ***Fear of Punishment***

***Alcohol.*** Participants responded that fear of punishment for other violations prevented cadets from reporting. The most common concern was cadets would be targeted for an alcohol

violation if they were drinking at the time of the incident. An alcohol violation had a high potential to end cadets' careers at USMA or make their remaining time at the Academy far more difficult by harming their reputation with the administration. Additionally, having an alcohol violation could harm cadets' chances of future employment. The administration had told cadets that amnesty would be given for alcohol violations when reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. However, many of the cadets were skeptical of this policy and were still afraid of reporting if they were intoxicated at the time of an incident.

*“Drinking may be happening in a situation that is prohibited by our rules and our regulations, that adds another consequence to the reporting of anything that happens, even if I didn't perpetrate a sexual assault. If I saw it and I was there and I was drinking, do I want to come forward and say, ‘Hey, we were all out drinking and I saw this?’ Just it's an extra layer of disincentivizing cadets to come forward with what's going on while they're doing the drinking.”* – **Faculty, Male**

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### ***Fear of Social or Professional Reprisal or Retaliation***

**Reputation.** Participants responded that potential damage to one's reputation was seen as a barrier to reporting. Due to the size of the campus, rumors and gossip spread quickly. Cadets might also negatively label other cadets who report. These two factors combined create reluctance to report, because it can very easily harm one's reputation. Additionally, cadets who are viewed as too sensitive are labeled as people to avoid. They can also be seen as a person who files false reports for attention.

*“In the company you don't want to be known as the girl who got raped or the girl who was sexually assaulted or sexually harassed and now everyone knows about it, because at that point you lose credibility...”*  
– **Sophomore, Female**

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**Alcohol.** Student participants indicated that they believed reports had less credibility when alcohol was involved in the situation. Students in the focus groups believed a cadet might not remember the entire incident clearly or conflicting stories may cast doubt on a cadet's testimony. On some occasions, participants noted other cadets had tried to convince reporting cadets that his or her testimony was flawed or they were misremembering because alcohol was consumed, even going so far as to tell others around campus that the reporting cadet was not credible. These actions could harm the reporting cadet's reputation with his or her peers as well as with the administration. Some cadet participants said they believed an intoxicated person who is sexually assaulted or sexually harassed was responsible for putting themselves into a risky situation. Beliefs like this could make the victim of sexual assault or sexual harassment place the blame on themselves, making them less likely to report.

*“You've got it wrong, you're remembering wrong, clearly you were just drunk or something and you don't remember this right.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

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**Rank Structure.** Participants noted that lower ranking cadets were intimidated by the chain of command, making them less likely to report. This sentiment was shared largely by the freshmen participants and seemed to stem from the belief that higher ranking cadets would be believed over lower ranking cadets. Higher ranking cadets have been on campus longer and were typically more familiar with other parties on campus, giving them more credibility when it comes to reporting.

*“If an upperclassman were to assault a lower class cadet, the lower class cadet would feel less inclined to report that upper-class cadet for fear that they initially did something wrong, perhaps, that maybe, you know, I’m the reason, I’m the victim in the situation, but I did something wrong that made the upper-class cadet make advances on me or assault me. And so I’m in the wrong when in actuality the upperclassman is.” – Faculty, Male*

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### **Fitting in.**

**Female Cadets.** Female cadet participants at USMA held the belief that they were outsiders who needed to work to fit into the campus culture. They reported they may be less likely to correct problematic behavior from male cadets because they did not want to be seen as different or not “one of the guys.” Female cadet participants said they felt they should expect and tolerate problematic or questionable gender-related behavior. Female student participants reported ascribing to the mentality that if one struggled with the culture at USMA, they would struggle with post-graduation military life.

*“I’ve seen harassment from guys making sexist comments, and sometimes girls don’t want to say it offends them because it is a male dominated society.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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**Male Cadets.** Male cadet participants at USMA did not experience the same issues with fitting into campus culture as female cadets, but they did have their own struggles when trying to fit in with their peers. Males in the focus groups stated they were often encouraged to accept and normalize what some considered to be forms of sexual harassment between fellow males. An example that was present almost exclusively on athletic teams involved teammates slapping or patting each other on the buttocks in order to give congratulations or acknowledge a job well done. Male cadets in the sessions said they were also encouraged to accept sexual harassment by female cadets as something to be desired. Cadets who do not accept these as norms were ostracized or became the target for ridicule.

*“Some people that...locker room talk or like what happens in the locker room, smacking each other’s butts, and they may be okay with it at the moment, but they know that it’s wrong, and they’re not—they’re scared to speak out. So that also plays into it, just the fear of like people around them getting a different perception of them.” – Freshman, Male*

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**Career Consequences.** Participants frequently reported that cadets did not turn in other cadets for any type of violation. There was an expectation at USMA for the cadets to police each other

and handle issues autonomously. The primary concern noted by participants was that if one could not handle an issue with a fellow cadet on one's own, they would not be able to handle military life or the responsibilities of being an officer. This mentality created reluctance to report any sort of violation, let alone sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Cadet participants were also reluctant to report because the consequences were viewed as too harsh. Punishment for many violations involved expulsion, which caused many cadets to think twice before escalating the situation up the chain of command. Reporting a cadet was viewed as ruining their military career. This thought appeared to weigh heavily on the cadet participants when they considered reporting. Additionally, a cadet who was expelled from USMA would often leave behind friends who would defend him or her. This could escalate to the point of ostracism or retaliation against the reporter, providing another barrier to reporting for cadets.

Finally, reporting another cadet for a violation can be seen as ruining one's own military career. Standing out too much during one's time at USMA was not necessarily seen as beneficial. On top of this, reporting another cadet had the potential to inadvertently create enemies for oneself, which could be harmful for a military career in the future.

*"...I've had quite a few friends who never wanted to report just because of that stigma that you get from reporting a cadet. As soon as you report a cadet for sexual harassment or assault, it's assumed you ended their career at the Academy." – Upperclassman, Female*

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## **The Process**

**Strenuous Formal Process.** Most cadet participants reported that they felt the entire reporting process was intimidating or stressful in some way. Some cadets in the focus groups reported that even if they did not know what the reporting process entailed, they knew it would be generally unpleasant. Additionally, the process was viewed as long and drawn out, which could exacerbate the stressful nature of the process. Participants believed cadets who report would have to relive their experience during the reporting process and would still see the accused party around campus until the investigation was completed.

*"They just want to move on, because this is a long process, it's not overnight, here's your report, all right, next week we'll do—we've tried everything else. You know, it takes a long time. So, you still have to see that perpetrator, even if you have a no contact order. But the rumors are still going to find you; people are still going to talk." – Upperclassman, Female*

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**Lack of Privacy.** Cadet participants stated the lack of privacy surrounding the reporting process was a barrier to formal reporting. Due to the small size of the campus, word traveled fast and rumors spread easily. Participants reported that there was little privacy at the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator's (SARC) office, and anyone could look into the waiting room to see who was there. Furthermore, any measures taken to separate the accused and the accuser (such as moving either party to a new company) made the incident more visible or caused others to ask questions surrounding these circumstances. Finally, there was a general belief that going

through cadet leadership to report an offense opened up the possibility of other cadets overhearing the report and spreading rumors. All of these risks of privacy created a significant barrier to reporting.

*“Everyone knows everybody, or everyone knows someone who knows someone who knows someone who knows that person. And then that trickle-down effect is really negative for a lot of people who report. Because literally every case that comes up here, somebody—whether it be honor or regs or something crazy that happened on a weekend—everyone knows what happened, even before the boards have happened, because somebody knows a friend who was in the central guard room when that person came in, and then they told their other friend who was dating this one guy...it’s like this entire chain where everybody, within hours of something that was said to the corps of cadets, everyone knows about it.” – Upperclassman, Female*

### **Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers**

**Unclear Definition.** Participants responded that although the definition of sexual assault was concise and clear, the definition of sexual harassment could be murky or confusing. Cadet participants reported feeling unclear on which behaviors were considered sexual harassment or were serious enough to report. Sexual harassment was also seen as a lower tier violation and not a serious enough issue to go through a reporting process, which could potentially shape their military career. The line for reporting an incident seemed to be crossed when a cadet was harmed during an incident. The perspective of some of the cadets was “I’m not hurt, so why proceed forward?” (Faculty, Female).

Sexual harassment was reportedly not taken as seriously as sexual assault. Cadet participants stated sexual harassment was often downplayed or joked about among some students. This could cause the violation to be seen as less serious or not worth reporting.

*“If you look at the definition of sexual harassment and sexual assault, sexual assault is like one and a half lines, while sexual harassment is such a big definition that it becomes so much more of a thing that it’s harder to say this was sexual harassment and I need to report this.” – Freshman, Male*

**Cadet Level Issue.** More so than sexual assault, sexual harassment was seen as an issue best handled by cadets. A sexual harassment violation was viewed as not as serious, and one should be able to handle these types of issues without escalating it up the chain of command. Oftentimes, sexual harassment was downplayed as simply flirting from other cadets, and this was rationalized as normal, as long as it did not get worse.

Male cadet participants were much more reluctant to report sexual harassment than female cadet participants. More than female participants, male participants reported that they should be able to handle this issue on their own. Male cadets in the focus groups indicated that they perceived themselves as tough and self-reliant and did not need a formal process to resolve a dispute.

Other male cadet participants suggested male cadets might view sexual harassment from women as something desirable.

*“I always feel like there’s a feeling that men always are looking for sexual relations, some sort of feeling like that. And so when other guys hear about somebody—another man reporting sexual harassment or something, they’ll be like, ‘Dude, isn’t that good, like you’re getting hit on by a girl, that’s like a positive thing.’”* – **Freshman, Male**

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## **Retaliation**

Participants were asked to discuss retaliation for reporting an offense and what forms of retaliation take place at USMA.

### **Ostracism**

Cadet participants and faculty participants at USMA frequently identified ostracism as the most common form of retaliation. Friends of the accused were seen as the most likely to ostracize the reporter in retaliation, but this could expand to a larger student population depending on the reputation and popularity of the accused or if the reporter has a bad reputation on campus. Other cadet participants reported that ostracism was not just the norm for reporters of sexual assault and sexual harassment, but for any cadet who reported his or her classmates for rules violations. This further reinforced the mentality that cadets should police each other and handle cadet issues autonomously, rather than involving the administration and moving up the chain of command. Some participants did not agree with these opinions, instead expressing that cadets were afraid of the *potential* of ostracism and retaliation. These participants opined that ostracism and retaliation for reporting happens very rarely, if at all, but the thought of experiencing retaliation kept cadets from reporting.

*“[Retaliation] will be like what happened with my friend. A lot of their friends stopped talking to them because they knew the person who assaulted...So those people that you are close to, or you thought you were close to, abandoned you, or they say some pretty shitty things about you...That’s what people are most afraid of.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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### **Private Social Media and Retaliation**

Anonymous social media, such as Jodel and the now defunct Yik Yak, were viewed by participants as toxic platforms on which retaliation occurred and salacious rumors were spread. Participants reported that many cadets would use these anonymous sites as a platform for voicing more controversial opinions on sexual assault and sexual harassment. These opinions reportedly expressed negative views of female cadets, joke about sexual assault and sexual harassment at USMA, and spread harmful rumors about other cadets. Some participants expressed frustration with the forums and wished that they would be banned or blocked at USMA. The use of social media as retaliation could often lead to damage to a cadet’s reputation and, ultimately, concerns about ostracism.

*“I think [Jodel is] good to get an actual sense of how people feel. Because you can go up to someone and be like I think women should be in the military, but that’s not really the vibe you get off of Jodel... You see what people think behind closed doors, things that they’re too ashamed to say in person because like it is frowned upon” – Freshmen, Female*

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## Training and Prevention

Cadet and faculty participants were asked their general perceptions of the effectiveness of training on sexual assault and sexual harassment and their contribution to prevention, as well as what changes they would make to training programs and what opportunities for improvement exist.

### Effectiveness

The training’s effectiveness or lack thereof was a key topic identified by many cadet and faculty participants. Numerous cadet and faculty who were in the focus groups indicated that the ineffectiveness of training causes an overall sense of resentment and cynicism among cadets. Most cadet participants reported that the Academy implements ways of collecting student feedback for trainings through anonymous surveys, but suggested changes were not always reflected in future trainings. Some cadet participants also indicated that providing feedback on these surveys was sometimes difficult, as they felt that they were expected to present solutions to problems instead of identifying areas for improvement. Some upperclassmen participants asserted that although training was not perfect, they “have made great strides.”

### Student Training

#### General Effectiveness

Cadet participants were asked how effective they perceived training on sexual assault and/or harassment to be. They identified four interrelated factors that negatively impacted the effectiveness of training: poorly trained/unengaging facilitators, perceived irrelevance of topics, training fatigue, and poor scheduling. Additionally, many cadet participants reported PowerPoint trainings were generally ineffective because of their uniform content and described them using the phrase “death by PowerPoint.”

*“I think, because obviously sitting in a classroom with PowerPoints, I literally couldn’t tell you what any of the PowerPoints said during any of my training.” – Freshman, Female*

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**Facilitator.** Cadet participant indicated facilitators were crucial to effective trainings and current training was not well led. One major issue was that unengaging facilitators established a poor tone for training. Further, facilitators who treated the trainings as “checking a box” on their to-do list rather than an opportunity for discussion seemed to validate cadets’ negative perception of the training and reinforced cynicism toward SHARP training. Cadet participants often indicated current trainings run by CASHA were low quality and suggested using professionals as

facilitators instead. Specifically, CASHA facilitators were seen as lacking training, experience, time, and incentive to produce and deliver an effective training.

*“[Training for CASHA facilitators is] all awful...having been a facilitator—for the last CASHA year, the only training that I got was like an hour brief at the beginning of the semester, which was a PowerPoint slide itself.”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

*“The trainers are the most influential in how the discussion goes in the classroom. I think that’s hands down the number one factor in affecting that...The training isn’t properly applied to the people that are in charge of the session, because I think it’s short and quick. And they just simply don’t have the time or incentive to put real effort into it...Like you have cadet lieutenant ‘X’ on the 46th out of his 48 months here, he’s just trying to graduate...They care about getting good grades and graduating on time. That’s what those incentives are...Because when you have someone that really doesn’t care, like a Firstie who’s just reading through the slides, those are the worst CASHA sessions to sit through because it just feeds off that person.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

*“You know, I watched our rep flip through the first six slides and say, ‘Oh, yeah, we don’t need to go through reporting procedures or anything of that nature because we don’t have any victims in the room.’ And I personally knew there were two people in the room that had gone through that.”*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

**Perceived Relevance.** Cadet participants often indicated that they perceived trainings on sexual assault and/or sexual harassment were not relevant to their day-to-day lives because cadets either were not experienced with the issue, did not believe sexual assault and/or sexual harassment would happen to them, or did not believe it was an issue at the Academy. Many cadets in the focus groups also indicated that they felt the majority of cadets already knew not to sexually assault or sexually harass people and most cadets were more likely to encounter sexual assault and/or sexual harassment as a bystander, so trainings should focus on effective bystander intervention. Some male student participants said they felt trainings were not applicable to them because of a focus on victims rather than bystanders, which was reinforced by stereotypes presented in the trainings, and in society at large, that women were victims and men were offenders. Finally, some cadet participants indicated trainings meant to curb offensive language backfired and introduced offensive terms some cadets have not heard before.

*“Yeah, I think there’s a lot of resentment in terms of having sat through things when you don’t think it’s actually relevant. And it’s really difficult to try and explain to people that this does happen and there are people in the room, you don’t know who’s in the room... So I think there’s just this sense of it can’t happen to me, it won’t happen to me.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**



**Training Fatigue.** Another factor discussed by the vast majority of cadet participants was the high frequency of training, leading to cadet resentment toward SHARP as well as an overall desensitization to the serious nature of sexual assault and sexual harassment and the SHARP process among cadets. Most cadet participants reported that the general reaction to a scheduled training was grumbling, which was indicative of cadets' negative attitude.

*“In some ways I almost feel like it should get toned down a little bit... in frequency, because you'll be in formation, morning formation, and they're like, 'Oh under-corps, under two classes, you've got CASHA training today.' And there's just a big groan in the whole company, people are just like, 'Oh, great, we're going to a CASHA briefing.'”* – **Freshman, Male**

*“But because the information is crammed down our throats, we do it – especially every month, people don't take it seriously. It desensitizes cadets to the whole situation. It desensitizes them to the acts and the signs [of sexual assault and sexual harassment] and everything that goes along with it.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

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**Scheduling.** Related to the frequency of training, cadets' busy schedules were one of the most discussed reasons for ineffective training, as it was difficult to find a good time to implement training. Scheduling training during free time was perceived as an interruption of what would otherwise be rare personal time that could be used to study and added to the feeling of resentment many cadet participants had toward training.

*“We don't have a lot of free time, and I think we're trying to jam so much into a short period of time...But I think when people—they all think it's a waste of our time regardless of what the training is. Like it could be a cool brief, but there's a reason why a lot of briefs are mandatory because otherwise people just won't go. Not because they're not interested, but just because everyone is so pressed for time. At the end of the day they're like well, my test grade is more important than me hearing, you know, that kind of thing.”* – **Freshman, Female**

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## Faculty Training

Faculty were also asked how they perceived trainings on sexual assault and/or sexual harassment.

### General Effectiveness

USMA faculty participants provided ambivalent responses regarding the effectiveness of their training, suggesting that SHARP training was not equally available among faculty. Some reported they were confident in their ability to deal with a cadet coming to them with issues related to sexual assault and/or sexual harassment, but many others expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to navigate such situations. This division appeared to lie between the military cadre in the focus groups, who felt more confident handling reports, and athletic and

academic leadership in the sessions, who felt less confident. It seemed probable that the military cadre participants were more likely to be invited or eligible for training, whereas academic and athletic leader participants were less likely to have the trainings available to them. Reasons as to why this possible division existed were not discussed. Faculty participants noted positive changes over time regarding training, specifically that it had gotten more intense, incorporated more discussion with cadets rather than just briefing slide decks, and now had more of an endorsement from leadership.

*“I send [cadet athletes] to the USCC [United States Corps of Cadets] channels, because I do work with them, but I’ve sat with a lot of student athletes and had discussions, so a lot of them have reached out to me post those discussions at workshops that we’ve done. And they’re all over my head. It’s not like – and I have to say to them ‘This is something that you should go through these channels, this is really important, you shouldn’t ignore this.’ But I don’t follow up beyond that, because it’s not that I don’t care for them, but I can’t help them, I’m not a professional.”*

– **Faculty, Female**

*“The Army has already set things in place, just like the institution, that you’re going to go from step one to step two to step three to step four. So I think anybody at this table would be extremely competent and confident to be able to get to someone for any cadet or soldier.”* – **Faculty, Male**

## Training Opportunities

Cadets and faculty participants were asked to identify opportunities to improve trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy. The two major opportunities that were mentioned were to incorporate new training topics and to improve the administration of the trainings.

## Topics

**Scenarios.** Most cadet participants claimed real-life scenarios would be useful in training as they would grab the attention of the audience and make training more authentic. Student participants discussed some of the current trainings in which a scenario between Cadet X and Cadet Y plays out: some claimed these scenarios were too common sense and that training topics should address more difficult gray areas to get students engaged and thinking. Those cadet participants who had experienced trainings involving real-life scenarios praised them, especially when the trainings were presented by facilitators who are experienced with administering sexual assault and/or sexual harassment training.

Because many cadet participants felt their trainings relied too much on gender-based stereotypes of victims and offenders, cadet participants indicated wanting to see more diverse cases with male victims, female offenders, and same sex cases. Cadet participants indicated this not only would make the trainings more engaging, but it would also help familiarize cadets with less frequently reported types of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Because many cadet participants said they believe male victims were less likely to report sexual assault and/or sexual

harassment or did not even understand they could experience sexual assault and/or sexual harassment due to social stigmas, they also believed efforts to illustrate male victimization would make male victims more comfortable with reporting offenses.

*“I just want to really repeat it. We need to talk about men on women, but we also need to bring into the discussion more so women on men, men on men, and woman on woman, because it is a problem. Not as much as the men on women, but it is a problem, we need to talk about it. Because these things happen.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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**Bystander Intervention.** Cadet participants often asserted trainings would be more effective if they emphasized the perspective of the bystander for various reasons. First, most cadet participants indicated that because they felt it unlikely that they would commit sexual assault and/or sexual harassment, focusing on something they were more likely to encounter (i.e., observing a situation where sexual assault was about to occur) would be more engaging for them. Second, others pointed out that because cadets who committed sexual assault and/or sexual harassment were always outnumbered by those who do not commit an offense, it would be more effective for the vast majority to focus on how to identify and stop a potential sexual assault/sexual harassment. Lastly, some cadets in the focus groups indicated that if they knew more concrete ways to recognize situations that are likely to lead to sexual assault and/or sexual harassment, they would be more likely to feel comfortable intervening. Cadet participants felt the bystander effect and a diffusion of responsibility were reasons individuals did not or would not intervene when observing a sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Training emphasizing that *one individual* could make a difference coupled with the message that consequences of sexual assault and/or sexual harassment could affect the victim’s career, life, and the strength and readiness of the military as a whole would resonate with cadets and increase bystander intervention.

*“It all seems very intangible. I don’t know what that role is in preventing sexual assault because I don’t know anyone who’s been sexually assaulted to my knowledge. And so I think when it’s that abstract—I think a lot of cadets are very invested in preventing sexual assault when they get to their new units and when they have subordinates who they know might be at risk, but it’s not always so clear to them what their role is.”*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

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**Healthy Relationships.** Cadet participants generally indicated that they felt that a focus on reinforcing positive behaviors alongside topics on preventing negative behaviors would be beneficial and help mitigate sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. Some cadet participants indicated a positive focus on good behavior might be better received by cynical cadets than a negative focus on bad behavior. Cadet participants reported specific topics might include how to develop healthy relationships with people of the opposite sex or how to interact with others who may have experienced sexual assault and/or sexual harassment in the past. One male faculty member participant indicated there was an opportunity to take advantage of the environment to develop cadet character to “change the culture through education and understanding of...healthy

relationships” and “allow cadets to actually wrestle with...how their perceptions are maybe different than healthy perceptions in gender relations and relationships.”

*“One of the best SHARP things that we had was built by one of the people in a company, and it was focused around...how to go about anything in the right way. Like how to interact with the opposite sex, have a normal conversation that isn’t tense and that leads to a positive sexual interaction, which we don’t talk about. We only talk about, what you said, prevent sexual assault, prevent this, prevent that. So I think we don’t talk about the little things or talk about them in a way that’s more positive. Like how do you go about a difficult situation... you want to do this but you’re not sure how they feel. Those are things that I think cadets generally don’t know how to navigate” – Upperclassman, Male*

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**Definitions.** Because many cadet participants reported that they felt the definition of sexual harassment was too vague, trainings that clearly defined what constituted sexual harassment or identified a spectrum of behaviors that could be considered sexual harassment would benefit cadets. Clearly defining sexual harassment would have two benefits: first, if cadets better understood the behaviors constituting sexual harassment, they would be more confident recognizing and reporting it if it happened to them, and second, clearer definitions could positively influence bystander intervention, allowing cadets to recognize the spectrum of behaviors if they saw them. Faculty participants echoed similar thoughts with a focus on the potential offender, claiming it was possible that some cadets are committing sexual harassment without fully understanding how their actions are wrong, and clarification of their definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment may stop potential offenders.

*“I think with assault a lot of people have a general understanding of what assault is. But I think the most beneficial training is identifying the different aspects of harassment, because what we talked about earlier, with it being such a gray area where it might be sexual harassment to one person but not to another. So I think that’s very beneficial to everyone to understand both ends of the spectrum of harassment so that...they can feel like when it’s necessary to report it. They’re not making the wrong decision.”*  
– Freshman, Male

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**Offender Focus.** Faculty participants indicated that they believed a focus on the offender in sexual assault and/or sexual harassment training was needed rather than a focus on the victim. Similar to the topic of bystander intervention, there was a pervasive belief that the majority of cadets already know what not to do regarding behaviors surrounding sexual assault and/or sexual harassment and that efforts should be focused on the minority who do commit sexual assault and/or sexual harassment, such as behavior profiles associated with sexual assaults and/or sexual harassment.

**Alcohol.** Some cadets and faculty also said they believe trainings that emphasize healthy alcohol use would be helpful because cadets’ typical use of alcohol often involves binge drinking, which

most cadets and faculty believe is a primary risk factor for sexual assault and/or sexual harassment.

### **Administration**

Cadet participants discussed a number of opportunities to improve the administration of training—namely the use of discussions rather than slide decks and scheduling trainings during class periods or as part of the overall curriculum instead of cadets’ free time. More general opportunities included better incentives by rewarding cadet facilitators for leading effective trainings, rewarding cadets for attending trainings, and using more informal language, as the language used in current trainings was perceived as too “politically correct” or “sanitized” to the point it is difficult to relate to. Cadet participants said they preferred a more conversational tone that struck a balance between anatomical correctness, “legal-ese,” and informal terminology. An approach suggested by a cadet participant was to have students volunteer to work with victims of sexual assault in local hospitals or shelters to drive home the reality and the consequences of sexual assault. Finally, some cadet participants indicated that because they all aspire to be military officers, they expected to be treated like officers in training. However, some believed trainings avoided addressing difficult issues head on out of fear of making students uncomfortable.

*“But, again, a Firstie doesn’t give a [expletive] or recognizes that their [facilitation] performance in the session correlates in no way, shape, or form with their anything. There’s just no incentive, right, there’s just no incentive.” – Upperclassman, Male*

**Discussions.** Cadet participants’ strong preference for small, group-based discussions about sexual assault and/or sexual harassment was discussed in nearly every focus group. Cadet participants indicated that discussions they have in official trainings or informal conversations were far more engaging and informative than trainings administered through slide decks. Cadet participants said they believed the engagement provided by discussions was the key for participants to be more open and honest, leading to greater potential for cadets to be personally invested, and that there was better chance for better takeaways for those cadets who might not “buy in” initially.

*“Because we have learned to turn off PowerPoints, flipped on lights and all right, we are talking. Now we are going to sit here and we are just going to talk. It’s been fascinating.” – Upperclassman, Male*

**Scheduling.** Cadet participants emphasized scheduling sexual assault and/or sexual harassment training during free time had a significant negative effect on morale. Cadet participants noted training would be seen as less intrusive if it were to take the place of a class period or if it were better incentivized for completion/performance. Athletic faculty participants also indicated sport off-seasons would be a good time to hold larger trainings, and smaller trainings could be scheduled around the larger athletic events.

**Facilitator.** Cadet participants reported that they wanted facilitators with experience providing training on sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. In particular, many cadet participants

identified good facilitators as those who were currently serving as military officers, SARCs or TAC officers, and individuals who had experienced sexual assault and/or sexual harassment personally. Cadet participants wanted to see officers, potentially Academy graduates, who could illustrate how dealing with sexual assault and/or sexual harassment was part of an officer's duties. Cadet participants emphasized how they were all at the Academy to become officers and how the words of current officers would be particularly powerful. Cadet participants also indicated SARCs or TAC officers would make good facilitators because of their experience with real victims and cases, as well as their knowledge of the reporting process. Finally, cadet participants wanted victims of sexual assault and/or sexual harassment to be facilitators because it would make the experience real for students, who otherwise might have little firsthand experience with the topic.

*“Bring in people with experience, people who have dealt with sexual assault and harassment or dealt with those issues in their unit and have them talk about it. Because I guarantee there’s one thing people will listen to is an officer with experience. If you have an officer who comes in and starts talking about well, with my unit, every single face in the room is wide-eyed staring at this person speak. That happens every time. So if you bring in people who have had experience with these things in the real Army and tell cadets, they’re going to listen to it.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“It’s interesting when I’ve had these conversations with officers, because they’re very quick to turn around and say well, this happened in my platoon or this happened in my company, and I didn’t realize at the time that I was at the Academy that it was relevant.” – Upperclassman, Female*

## Prevention

Cadet and faculty participants largely indicated the best approach to prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment was through effective training. Although many cadet and some faculty participants illustrated shortcomings of the training in its current state, many upperclassmen and faculty participants asserted the trainings were vastly improved over those in previous years and were on the right track. Cadet and faculty participants also typically noted that student ownership of the issue was an effective approach, pointing to CASHA and Denim Day. Although CASHA was not viewed favorably by all cadet participants, this seemed to be caused by poorly facilitated CASHA briefings, which could be remediated by providing CASHA facilitators with better incentives to perform well, more time to prepare briefings, and providing access to facilitators who are experienced with sexual assault and/or sexual harassment. The opportunities for training topics and administration that were suggested by cadet participants seemed likely to improve cadet “buy in” to training, increasing overall student ownership and further mitigating sexual assault and/or sexual harassment.

## Chapter 3: U.S. Naval Academy

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A total of ten 90-minute focus groups were conducted at the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA) between March 20 and March 23, 2017. Of the 10 groups, seven groups were with participants and three were with faculty and staff. A total of 73 midshipmen and 44 faculty members participated.

### General Culture

USNA is located in Annapolis, MD, about 30 miles east of Washington, DC. Student participants perceived themselves to be isolated from the surrounding community due to campus restrictions, which include limited interactions off campus on weekends. Many students indicated that they feel that the campus is not like a “normal” civilian school because of their strict schedules and required commitments to sports and academics.

### Leadership

Participants in all 10 focus groups were asked who the leaders are at the school. Midshipmen participants viewed all members of the Academy community as serving in some type of leadership role; however, they felt there must be a chain of command. All midshipmen and faculty members who participated in the focus groups recognized the individuals in the chain of command from the student level up to the Superintendent and Commandant. Midshipmen participants indicated that they perceived leaders and leadership at the Academy to include military leadership, Academy leadership, and midshipmen participants leadership. The Superintendent (often referred to as the “Supe”) and Commandant (known as the “Dant”) were the key Academy leaders, whereas company leaders were peer leadership. The consensus was everyone from students to coaches to the Superintendent served in a leadership role at some point during their career at USNA.

*“I think obviously the Superintendent, the Commandant, the company officers, and SCLs. All the military structure with the leadership would be the first thing that would come to mind for leadership.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“Everyone has some kind of leadership role, whether it’s peer leadership and authoritatively or if it’s just informal. Everyone kind of steps up at one point or another.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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When identifying who had the most influence on their day-to-day life at the Academy, students recognized their company leaders and upper-class peers. Other people who had an influence are coaches, same year peers, and faculty.

*“I think the company officers and the NCOs and upperclass[men]; I think they set the tone for the company, especially for the new class coming in and*

*the next six months starting into plebe year. I think that's pretty important for the atmosphere you set coming in."* – **Upperclassman, Female**

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### **Leadership's Attitude Toward Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy**

Leadership's attitude toward any given policy had the tendency to trickle down and affect the Academy as a whole. Sexual assault and sexual harassment had become leadership's main focuses in improving quality of life and safety for midshipmen participants at the Naval Academy. The Superintendent and the Commandant set the tone for the Academy, and midshipmen and faculty participants believed there had been tangible changes since the current Commandant and Superintendent came aboard.

*"...I've just been around [the Commandant] and we have had that type of conversation and he seems really serious about it. And I think he might—especially being with the Marines—he might have had a lot of contact with these situations and he seemed really serious about it."*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

*"...the Commandant...—there are tangible changes since we got a new one."*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

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Students in the focus groups said they believed the Commandant and Superintendent were addressing the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment appropriately. Leadership continued to support the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) advocates on campus as additional resources for midshipmen participants. Overall, midshipmen participants felt sexual assault and sexual harassment were priorities on campus.

### **Social Aspects of Academy Life**

#### **Alcohol**

Alcohol was a major component of Academy life, even though its use was explicitly banned on campus grounds (except for sanctioned events) and for the freshman class. Because of alcohol's large role in campus life, midshipmen in the sessions said they were willing to forego restrictions in order to access it.

*"If they can break a rule or if they can get away with pushing boundaries or something, they tend to do it. It's almost like there's a lot of people here who get in trouble, get caught with alcohol, especially the kids that I teach that I know of with my experiences. And they just want to go have fun and do something, and they're basically willing to sacrifice breaking the rules. They're willing to pay the consequences of breaking rules just so that they can go out and have a night of fun."* – **Faculty**

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*“...and it still happens now. Sometimes when you have so many restrictions I think it encourages people to almost rebel against the restrictions themselves, and you don’t have I think the same level at other schools.” – Faculty*

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**Policy.** Like most policy decisions, the Commandant and Superintendent set the tone for alcohol use. There were rules and policies in place for the midshipmen that clearly defined the use of alcohol on campus. Faculty and staff members in the sessions noted alcohol use was permitted on campus other than at strictly controlled events.

*“...drinking is very restricted on campus, like alcohol is very restricted. They can get in a lot of trouble if they drink outside those rules. And so I think it almost creates a more controlled environment on campus.” – Faculty*

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Under the current leadership, the policy had been changed to support the responsible use of alcohol for those who are of age to consume it, which was a change from the previous policy in which no alcohol was allowed to be consumed at any time by any midshipman. A current policy only allowed upperclassmen to use alcohol. To encourage responsible drinking, safety briefings were held on Fridays to reinforce responsibility and good judgment in situations in which alcohol was involved.

**Alcohol Usage.** Alcohol was used by midshipmen participants, both those who were underage and those who were of the legal drinking age. Both student and faculty participants reported that they felt the culture of the Academy encouraged binge drinking; the strict restrictions made it difficult for students to maintain the standards that were set out for them regarding alcohol use. Specifically, they indicated that they felt the stringent control of consumption created an environment hyper-focused on alcohol. Therefore, the students seek out opportunities for consumption when they had liberty. Faculty and midshipmen participants reported feeling that if they were treated as responsible adults and were educated on alcohol use, then alcohol would not have the appeal that it currently does on campus.

**Weekends.** Because alcohol use was restricted on campus and students were not permitted to live off campus, permissible drinking was concentrated within a few hours on the weekends. All interviewed groups mentioned the pervasiveness weekend drinking and how the limited timeframe sets up an environment ripe for binge drinking.

*“I know people that go out too and get blackout drunk almost every weekend.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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**On versus Off Campus.** Alcohol usage occurred primarily off campus. When midshipmen participants noted when students were off campus, alcohol use was less monitored and they were free to make their own decisions. Going out to drink off campus was considered an event by students; it was viewed along the same lines as going to a movie or a school dance.

*“I think a lot of it was having that whole week of being busy and all stressed out to the weekend. And you only have that time period in which you drink,*

*unless you're going home. So you feel like you have to cram that alcohol in that one weekend.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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## **Relationships**

Relationships at the Academy are complex, and they were bound by rules that do not exist on civilian college campuses. Two policies were brought up by midshipmen and faculty participants during the groups: (1) the open-door policy and (2) the dating policy. The Academy has a policy in which the doors were to remain unlocked and open during daytime hours. This allowed for surprise inspections and was used as a deterrent for any behavior that could get the midshipmen participants in trouble. Midshipmen were allowed to close and lock their doors overnight and during some on-campus events where they needed to avoid pranks and mischief from the upperclassmen.

Dating came with its own set of rules at the Academy. Policy dictated that it was against the rules to date someone within your own company, and it was highly discouraged to date someone within your own class year. Upperclassmen could not date freshmen, and freshmen could not date outside of their class year. Students looked down on dating someone at the Academy; it was believed to cause problems with teamwork and other areas of interaction should the couple break up.

**Non-Romantic.** Non-romantic relationships were common at the Academy. Lasting friendships and camaraderie were part of day-to-day life. Students at USNA often go on to serve with people that they had formed bonds with at the Academy after they graduate. When going out on the town, the female students referred to their male friends or fellow midshipmen as “brothers who looked out for us.”

**Romantic.** Romantic relationships were especially complex at the Academy. Romantic relationships were permitted on campus; however, they were governed by several rules that, as one midshipman said, “...make them inconvenient.” The romantic relationship policies and rules at USNA were viewed as more restrictive than the other Service Academies, and they could make normal relationship behavior seem out of place. For instance, midshipmen participants viewed the open-door policy as overly restrictive and they thought the policy assumed they would not act responsibly.

*“I also think that some of the other Service Academies don't have the same rules as us. So that just doesn't make sense at all. At West Point, you can have the door closed. And I think it's really bad for our relationships, like males and females at the Academy too, because that just creates a negative stigma about having a guy in your room tutoring you in physics class or something like that. It's just really hard.” – Sophomore, Female*

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Faculty and midshipmen participants had stated that the policies and rules were set to expose relationships and force people to conduct themselves in a way that may not be natural in the scope of a university setting.

*“Our policies are meant to expose relationships. For example, when a guy and girl are in a room together, the door has to be open. If my friend, you know, I’ve never had feelings for him, he’s never had feelings for me, he’s over helping me with my physics homework and one of my plebes walks by, you know, two nights in a row and sees him tutoring me, they automatically can assume, ‘Hey, they’ve got a thing for each other,’ you know. And rumors start going. So it just feels like the policies here are meant to like shove your relationships onto display and like put it out there for everyone.”*

– **Sophomore, Female**

*“...there are a lot of rules that are associated with socializing and socializing within your company and within a different year, and then fraternizing and more of a romantic socializing. So there’s a lot of—it’s not like regular day-to-day life. So I would say there’s restrictions that don’t exist in kind of regular day-to-day life”* – **Faculty**

### **Communication Among Midshipmen**

Midshipmen who participated in the focus groups were asked about communication and how it occurred on campus. Conversations focused mostly on word of mouth and social media. Both of those modes of communication play a large role on campus.

**Word of Mouth.** Word of mouth was very effective when spreading news or gossip. Word of mouth for the midshipmen participants was primarily a face-to-face conversation. Midshipmen participants stated most conversations occurred out on the yard or during lunch time at squad tables. Depending on the severity or novelty of the news item, information spreads quickly throughout Bancroft Hall, where the students live and sleep.

*“I think our lifestyle allows word of mouth because we all live within so close of each other. At lunch this kid just got fried in my company, and we all knew about it within five minutes because his roommates were like, ‘Whoa, did you hear about this?’ And they were coming to everybody and talking about it. We have formation together, we eat lunch together, we see so much of each other. We have mandatory events together. So we are always together. We don’t have to text each other; we see each other all the time. So it’s easy to pass by in the hall and be like, ‘Hey, did you hear?’”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

Student leadership appeared to be responsible for the spread of the information. Rumors were not directly addressed by administration unless they became a distraction for the midshipmen.

*“I have a company officer who’s sitting in her office when the chief officer is sitting in her office with a plebe, and the third class is standing out there with nothing else to do but eavesdrop on the company officer and the chief’s conversation. So they’ll be like, ‘Oh, man, I heard this thing went on from like the chief,’ or ‘This person is in trouble.’”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

*“I feel if rumors get really bad, then the Commandant will straight up address it and say we don’t have enough information to give. And they won’t tell you what actually happened, but they know rumors are going if there’s gossip spreading around, how does that happen?”*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

**Social Media.** There was a disconnect between faculty/staff and students on the perceived role of social media on campus. Faculty/staff hold the opinion that social media was a large part of life at the Academy. It was viewed as a mechanism to express unfiltered opinions.

*“[Social media plays] a huge role. It gives them the kind of ability to say anything they want to say without filtering, without being held accountable until someone sees it, until someone calls them out on it. So they’re still on that, I hate to have to say it, a high school kind of drama to say whatever they want without ramifications, until they realize, have you thought about what you said before you hit enter, did you think before you speak...”* – **Faculty**

However, midshipmen participants felt social media was not used much, especially because it could hurt one’s career should they say or post something that may be viewed as offensive or irresponsible. Most midshipmen participants used texting or e-mail as a means to communicate electronically. They did not define this as social media.

*“You’re surrounded by people that go to the Academy with you 24/7. I don’t talk to any of my friends or anyone really from the Academy on any social networks. I don’t really use social media that much anyway. I guess maybe I’m not a great example. I only use it to communicate with people back home or with family from a different place.”* – **Freshman, Male**

*“I think [social media] would be something where it would be more sort of anonymous, just because someone would be afraid of hurting their career or getting in trouble themselves or maltreatment.”* – **Mixed Class, Male**

*“People don’t use that stuff [Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter].”*  
– **Mixed Class, Male**

## Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Midshipmen participants had a good understanding of sexual assault; however, their understanding of sexual harassment was less than clear. Although midshipmen in the sessions could broadly define sexual harassment, they had difficulty knowing when to report it and how to report it. On the other hand, sexual assault had a very clear definition for the midshipmen participants, and they were comfortable in their understanding of sexual assault.

## Definitions

### **Sexual Assault and Unwanted Sexual Contact**

Midshipmen participants seemed to feel confident in their understanding of what sexual assault was. Most viewed it as crossing the line from verbal taunting and calling to touching that was not wanted or desired. There was a range of behavior that falls into sexual assault and unwanted sexual contact (USC) as understood by the midshipmen in the focus groups. They indicated that they felt sexual assault was a fairly clear-cut and easily discernible event.

*“We view sexual assault as kind of an umbrella term, ranging from unwanted sexual contact all the way up to rape.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“I feel the definition is pretty clear, it’s unwanted by one party when someone else is touching, anywhere from like rubbing your shoulder and like continuing from there or anything like that to more graphic advances.”  
– Sophomore, Male*

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### **Sexual Harassment**

Unlike sexual assault/USC, sexual harassment had a much less clear definition for the student participants. They viewed it as a matter of degree and personal opinion. In other words, what may be sexual harassment to one person may not be the same to another person. This was the main reason for the lack of clarity surrounding sexual harassment. Midshipmen in the focus groups indicated the military does very well with issues that were clearly defined or “black and white,” whereas issues in “gray” areas were not as well addressed.

*“I think sexual harassment is one of the blurrier ones at least at the Academy, because some comments will be construed—they’ll just think it’s a joke or whatever. But there’s joking and then there can be a joke from one perspective, but from another perspective it’s just not okay. And I think that’s one of the things that is not addressed here as often, because it is a blurry subject. ...at the Academy we’re really, really good with black and white. But when you get into a gray area, it’s more difficult.”  
– Freshman, Female*

*“I think that one [sexual harassment] is a lot more iffy. Because sexual assault I think is very black and white. It’s just like unwanted advances. But sexual harassment is kind of subjective and it’s pretty much up to the victim in this case, what they consider harassment, and you really don’t know what they’re thinking...” – Sophomore, Male*

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## General Perceptions

### Sexual Assault

Sexual assault was taken seriously at the Naval Academy, according to the midshipmen and faculty participants. The students discussed how they have received and continue to receive training on sexual assault prevention. The freshman class looked to upperclassmen to set the tone regarding the issue of sexual assault. Students in the sessions indicated that although they did not always get along, they are, indeed, a family, and people looked out for each other while out in town on liberty in contrast to the same caution being not as necessary on campus where they felt it was a safer environment.

**Fear of Being SAPR'd.** Due to the Academy culture, male midshipmen participants had a fear of being charged with sexual assault, called SAPR'ing. SAPR'ing was being reported to command through official channels at the Academy for committing sexual assault or sexual harassment. Midshipmen participants described the behavior that male recruits engaged in to avoid the appearance of something inappropriate occurring, such as “racing to” open doors if they close accidentally or rarely being alone with a student of the opposite gender while on campus.

*“Yeah, if the door closes for a second they run to open it up because they don't want to get SAPR'd. It's just a huge thing, and it's definitely something they need to be aware of, and especially us too, it needs to be a topic that we talk about. But at the same time, I feel like they get so squeamish and uncomfortable, because I think some of the programs make them feel that way, if that makes any sense.” – Freshman, Female*

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**Open Door Policy.** Some midshipmen in the focus groups pointed out that the open-door policy at the Academy had created an environment of suspicion and separation among midshipmen participants. They said they felt it created artificial barriers between midshipmen and created a culture of suspicion and scrutiny when it was unnecessary.

*“So you just have to—you can be in a relationship and everything, but you don't want people to think that you are doing anything basically. So if I go in a girl's room I'm very careful to make sure the door is open like it's supposed to be, and just because even if you're not doing anything, it's the perception.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“Maybe this is a tangent, but I'm still hoping for a change with the door-closed policy. I think that that creates a culture in which there's just—it's like there's just too much of a separation, it's that automatic line. And I think that with a change in that you would see a change in culture, in how guys interact with women here.” – Freshman, Female*

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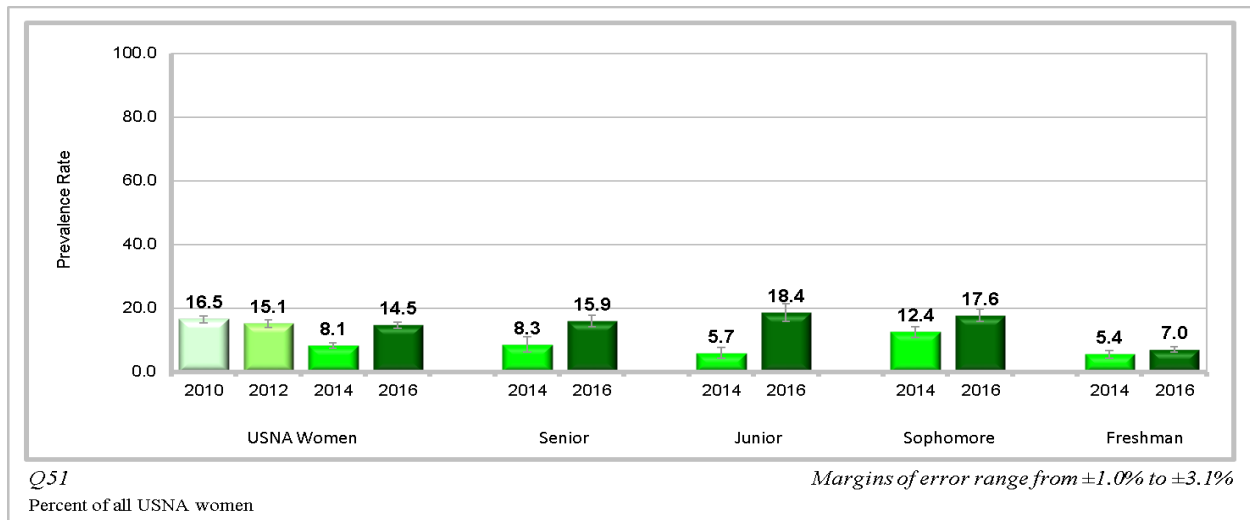
### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment was hard to define for midshipmen participants. They viewed it as a gray area that was dependent upon the people and circumstances involved. Midshipmen in the sessions reported that they felt like they would be viewed negatively if they were to describe behaviors such as telling a joke as sexual harassment. Midshipmen participants also relayed the boundaries of sexual harassment among same-sex peer groups could be different and harder to identify.

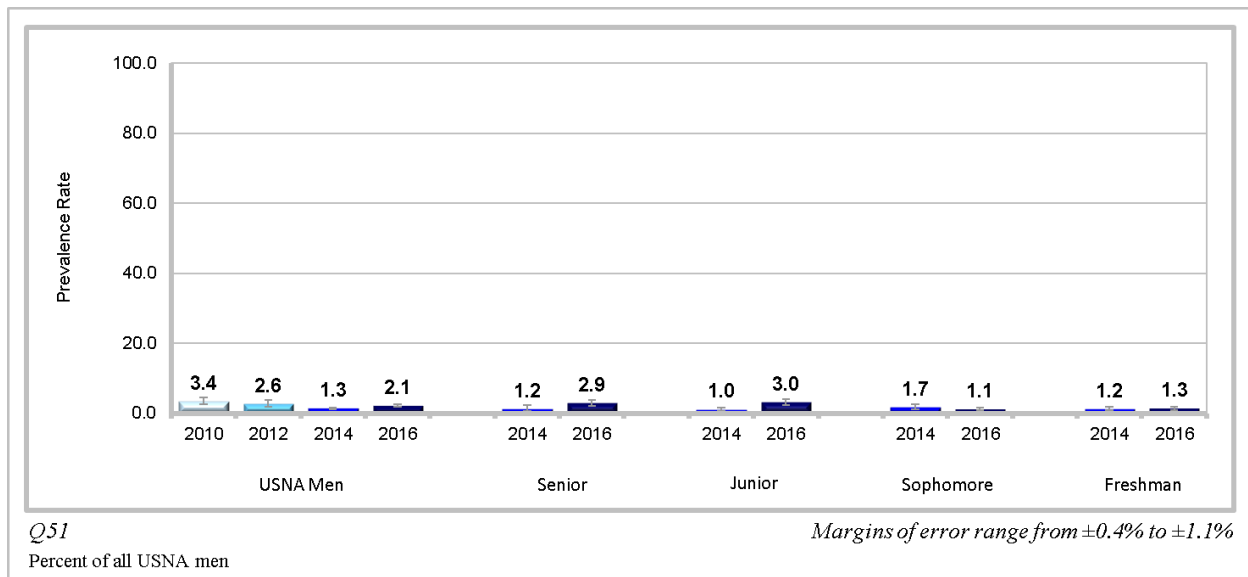
### Participant Perceptions on Survey Results from the 2016 SAGR

The faculty, staff, and midshipmen participants were asked to review the survey results from the 2016 SAGR and discuss their opinions and reactions to the data. Figure 4 and Figure 5 show experiences of USC by gender and class year; there were also displays of previous data collection years. The following sections briefly outlined and reviewed the groups’ reactions and opinions regarding the results from the figures shown below.

**Figure 4.**  
*Percentage of USNA Women Who Indicated Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Contact, by Class Year and Survey Year*



**Figure 5.**  
**Percentage of USNA Men Who Indicated Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Contact, by Class Year and Survey Year**



## General Reactions

Some midshipmen in the focus groups were not surprised by the results of the study. They said they believed the environment, seriousness of offense, and how the midshipmen were taught to deal with problems had an effect on the data and how USC was reported. However, other groups of faculty and midshipmen participants were surprised by the results reported. Of particular note was the dip in 2014; faculty recalled it may have been due to a briefing emphasizing the Academy's reputation, which occurred before the survey was administered. Participants were also surprised that there were few reports of sexual harassment.

## Class

**Freshmen.** Midshipmen and faculty participants were not surprised by the low incidence of USC among freshmen. They attributed this low incidence to the strict and regimented lives of freshmen at the Naval Academy and their relative lack of opportunity and freedom. It was also noted that freshmen may not be as comfortable reporting USC even in a survey.

*“When they were plebes they were under scrutiny, they were under the most severe restrictions; they have the least amount of freedom. Where, by second class year all of that has opened up. So you are talking about two different time frames in their life here, in their life cycle of midshipmen.” – Faculty*

*“...plebes aren't feeling comfortable sharing as much. I don't know. It seems like a pretty big jump from 10% from freshman to sophomores, and sophomores don't have that much more liberty. So I mean this is conjecture, but maybe it's plebes not feeling super comfortable sharing because there are*



*so many rules and because there are eyes on us. I don't know."*

– **Freshman, Female**

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**Sophomores.** Midshipmen and faculty participants were not surprised by the reported incidences of USC among the sophomore class compared to the freshmen class. They attributed the higher prevalence rate to two factors: more freedom and more education. Midshipmen participants indicated that they believed that because sophomores were given more generous liberty, the chances of USC occurring increased. They also reported that sophomores had more education surrounding sexual assault and sexual harassment; because of that education they were better able to define what sexual assault and sexual harassment were and were more likely to report them.

*"I think it's also very reflective of what goes on here during each year at the Academy, because at freshman year you're really like contained and your life is very regimented, so there's not going to be a ton of opportunities for stuff like that to happen. Sophomore year there's a lot less for us to do around campus."* – **Sophomore, Male**

*"Training was a little different and they would have gotten a different type of training in that time frame."* – **Faculty, Female**

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**Upperclassmen.** Student participants expressed some surprise at the rate of USC among upperclassmen. It was surprising to them that the rate of USC was as high as it was reported to be. However, they noted that upperclassmen, like sophomores, were given more liberty than freshmen, and they reported believing that this puts them in situations where the chance of USC was higher. Education concerning sexual assault and sexual harassment also played a role, according to the midshipmen participants. They said they thought that because upperclassmen had more education, it was easier to respond in the survey due to their level of understanding of the definitions of USC and sexual harassment.

*"I agree with what she said. And like we get more educated about it, because sometimes even firsties are the 2014 freshman, and then we're the 2016 juniors, and we jumped up like 13%. Like that can be either that happened, like 13% happened here and people are like, 'Wow, I was sexually assaulted' or something like that. So I figure it's a lot to do with the education that you get while you're here as well."* – **Upperclassmen, Female**

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## **Gender**

Midshipmen and faculty members who participated in the focus groups diverged in their reactions to the gender differences reported in 2016 SAGR. Faculty members were not surprised by the differences in rates between males and females. Although the results were disturbing, they were not surprised by the differences in the USC rates. Midshipmen participants, on the other hand, were surprised the rate of USC was so much higher for women than men.

*“I’m not surprised by the lower rates of men versus women. But I also think it makes me sad, because I know that there are so many fewer women than men in the brigade. So that means that of the small amount of women, a significantly greater portion of them are coming out.” – Faculty, Female*

*“I just think that the figures are much higher than I would expect for the women. For the men that’s probably like what I would have expected...I would have thought that would be somewhere under 5% still, whereas men are maybe 1:2. It’s like two to three times higher. But where it’s... like seven times higher for women than men, that’s kind of surprising.”*  
– Freshman, Male

**Female.** The midshipmen participants were disturbed and bothered by the high USC rate for women. It was surprising to some that there was such a high prevalence rate, because they said that it was not publicly discussed or known about on campus. Midshipmen participants stated the high prevalence of USC could be occurring without being made public at the Academy, because the Academy was doing a better job of being discrete about it. This high rate made some of the midshipmen participants upset and uncomfortable because they viewed the Academy as a safe place.

*“And 15% of women is a pretty high number. So to never hear anything about it and then have a number as big as that, you can’t really—it’s hard to isolate 15% of people and yet we really don’t hear anything.”*  
– Freshman, Male

*“It just kind of makes me uncomfortable, the fact that it happens so much. Obviously there’s a lot more men here than there are women. So 3% of the male population is not the same as 3% of the female population. But it still makes me uncomfortable to see that so many people are still experiencing this regardless of if it trends down or not. It just makes me uncomfortable.”*  
– Sophomore, Male

**Male.** Midshipmen participants were not surprised by the results for men in the survey. However, they acknowledged the rates of USC and sexual harassment among men were most likely higher than reported on the survey. There were several factors they believe lead to the lack of official reports of USC and sexual harassment compared to incidents reported on the survey, including desensitization to gestures that were considered USC, embarrassment and shame, and concerns it would affect their career. Overall, it appeared there was a perception that males did not make official reports. Participants indicated that they believe the results of the study were high because some males may have felt comfortable reporting on an anonymous survey but they would not make an official report due to the harm it would do to their career.

*“I mean this is like pretty, pretty complex. But going back to when you say high school locker room with your football team and you’ve got guys smacking each other’s butts, people I feel like are desensitized to certain actions that are happening. So they’re used to it and so they’re less sensitive*

*to certain things, like sexual contact on the butt or whatever. So I feel like when they're being asked these questions on the survey, they're like that's not really a big deal and so they put no. And so I feel like there's less numbers because of that.*” – **Upperclassman, Male**

### **Multiple Offenses**

Using data from the 2016 SAGR survey, Table 3 displays—of those who indicated experiencing USC—the percentages of women and men who experienced more than one incident of USC. Table 3 also shows—of those who experienced more than one incident—what percentage involved the same offenders.

**Table 3.**

*Percentage of USNA Students Who Indicated Experiencing Multiple Incidents of Unwanted Sexual Contact and Indicated the Same Offenders Were Involved*

<b>Of those who experienced USC since June 2015</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Experienced more than one incident	59%	54%
Same offenders were involved	30%	37%

Faculty and midshipmen in the sessions reported that they believe that if a person experienced multiple incidents, the person committing the offense was most likely the same person each time and probably knew the victim. Many wondered if one incident was reported multiple times. However, some were surprised at the rate at which multiple offenses occurred.

*“...that's what I was going for. If they did report it two separate times, then the administration and institution obviously failed that victim in helping orchestrate a situation where it wouldn't happen again.”* – **Faculty**

It was hard for midshipmen participants to understand why the multiple assaults occur and they struggled to find an explanation for why it might happen. This difficulty may have been due to a misinterpretation of the results. Some students in the focus groups appeared to be confusing actual reports to a military authority with students who reported they experienced multiple incidents with the same offender on the survey. However, regardless of the interpretation, students appeared surprised by the amount of same offender assaults that took place.

*“You know, that first number about the people that experienced more than one incident for me kind of surprised me. Like, you know, you're talking about 59%, 54% of those who report. And then a third of that or over a third who have been the same person, the same people. I just thought it was kind of surprising that that many people had it more than once, and that many people on top of that had the same offender involved. You don't really think of it happening more than once.”* – **Freshman, Male**

## Bystander Intervention

Most of the students and faculty participants said they believe midshipmen would intervene in the case of a potential sexual assault. However, students and faculty in the focus groups differed in how severe the potential sexual assault would have to be for a midshipman to intervene. Faculty said they believe a student would intervene to stop a sexual assault, but the assault would have to be very evident.

*“If you can make it clear cut, if it’s very, very clear cut, then I think a lot of midshipmen would intervene because I think they want to think of themselves as people of high moral character. And I don’t think many or any of them would want to think that they would allow sexual assault to occur. So if it’s very, very clear cut, very, very clear cut, they would intervene...if there’s any doubt in their mind, they’ll probably back off because there is a personal risk to them to intervene in a situation.” – Faculty, Female*

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Midshipmen participants across all classes reported that they felt they would intervene if they saw a high-risk situation occurring or about to occur. They defined a high-risk situation as one in which a midshipman was caught in an altered state without any support from other midshipmen.

*“I think a lot of people would step in, because say it’s a guy sexually assaulting a girl. That’s obviously like the most common thing at the Academy at least. Or yeah, the girls are like our sisters, we are all going to stand up for them. If it’s someone that is not in your company, we’re all brothers and sisters in arms and we’re all going through the same stuff together. So I think people are going to step in regardless, even if it’s an upperclassman and you’re a plebe, at that point the plebe and the upperclassman divide doesn’t matter.” – Freshman, Male*

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One caveat to intervening was if the midshipman did not know the people in the situation well, especially if both people involved were midshipmen participants. Midshipmen participants expressed some hesitation to intervene, because they would not want to interfere in a situation in which they might perceive something differently than the people in the situation.

*“... you’ve just kind of got to ask is everything okay. And you just kind of know if the person is getting harassed just depending on how they react. But if you think something is wrong and you are uncomfortable stepping in right there, you’re going to tell the company officer, an upper class[man] there’s a disturbance in the hallway, I think that’s probably the way you could deal with it without directly.” – Freshman, Male*

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Midshipmen participants also expressed that they felt the training they received helped them become more aware of potential problems and of their own behavior. The training gave them the knowledge to know what to look for and how to provide exits out of the situation while de-escalating it.

*“... that’s something that we are getting better at I guess. We had one, our class had a training this year, escalation training, and no one was really happy to go to it but...you could learn from it because there’s a lot of signs that people don’t really realize something is happening. Because there’s just little things and they blow it up. And so I think that now, as we learn to recognize those signs, I think people are more willing to step in because they don’t think that it’s just a small thing but they realize it could be something bigger.” – Sophomore, Male*

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Another caveat was the role alcohol plays in the situation. Although midshipmen participants expressed feeling comfortable stepping in, the environment and context of a situation sometimes proved difficult for them to make the judgment about a potential sexual assault.

*“I feel like even beyond that, even in the context of alcohol being used, just the party aspect, people are coming to have a good time, which often includes something of a sexual nature. And then in that circumstance, it’s hard to tell where that line is drawn, because there’s a lot of sexual dancing usually, and then where is that line drawn, right? Where did a girl draw the line? And sometimes people make that differently. So I feel like that party atmosphere kind of throws a different kind of wrench in the ability to determine what is serious or is not a sexual assault” – Upperclassman, Male*

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## **Role of Alcohol**

Alcohol’s role in sexual assault and sexual harassment was not as clear cut as it would seem at USNA. Although some midshipmen participants indicated that they believed alcohol does play a role in sexual assault and sexual harassment, other student participants believed one’s personal character was more responsible for one’s own actions. That is, they believed only a person who was predisposed to such behavior would commit a sexual assault or sexual harassment and alcohol only provided the “courage.”

*“I don’t think alcohol leads to sexual assault or harassment...But I do think a lot of times when there is a sexual assault or sexual harassment alcohol is involved, if that makes sense.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“I feel like people that sexually assault someone, they always try to blame it on the alcohol, ‘Oh, I was so drunk I didn’t know what I was doing.’ No. Most people know what they’re doing and it just took you feeling a little courageous because you were under the influence to say like, ‘Yeah, I’m going to do that,’ when it clearly wasn’t okay.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## **Existing Relationships as a Factor in Sexual Assault/Harassment**

Existing relationships were troublesome when considering them in the context of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Midshipmen participants reported that they believed sexual assault could happen in relationships, but it added a certain level of complexity to intervening. There was a

perception that some people may think that because they are/were in a relationship with a person, a certain level of contact and intimacy was presumed.

*“I think a lot of times the personal relationship, like whether it’s a guy with a girl or whether it’s a guy with a guy or a girl with a girl, whatever it is, they can think it’s okay because they’re in a relationship, they may be more forceful or something. But obviously it’s never okay; you always need consent, whatever your relationship status is.” – Freshman, Male*

Related to existing relationships was experiencing multiple incidences of sexual assault and harassment. Midshipmen participants suggested that existing relationships may be a part of the multiple incidences reported in the survey.

## Reporting and Retaliation

Midshipmen and faculty participants were asked about the reporting process for sexual assault and sexual harassment, barriers to reporting, and if retaliation is an issue with regard to making a report of sexual assault or sexual harassment at the Academy.

### Familiarity with Reporting Options

Midshipmen participants were confident that they know how and where to report sexual assault and sexual harassment and the differences between restricted and unrestricted reports. However, faculty members in the focus groups said they felt disconnected from the process. Faculty participants were separated from the midshipmen participants because of their role. However, faculty members were seen as safe by the students, so many have been approached by students for assistance when they have experienced a sexual assault. Faculty members in the sessions indicated that they think focused training on how to provide assistance to midshipmen who have experienced a sexual assault would greatly benefit them and the midshipmen participants.

*“I think the great thing about here is we know how to report. Everyone has the opportunity to report and everyone knows how to help other people report. So they don’t report because there are other reasons, like they don’t want to revisit it, or they don’t want people to think of them as certain ways. It’s a personal thing, it’s the Academy.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“There is a pretty significant disconnect. Again, like I said earlier, church and state. There are SHAPE [Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education] mentors that participate in that curriculum. If people didn’t participate in that curriculum, I don’t think anybody who didn’t participate in that curriculum would know...faculty are not mandatory reporters as best I know. And the reason faculty are not mandatory reporters is because we’re not in the midshipmen’s chain of command. So that’s an interesting kind of twist on this one, that you have people that they come to sort of perceiving that we’re outside and can offer advice, who aren’t well educated on maybe*

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*the resources that are available to them or the policies that they're under.” – Faculty, Female*

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## Reactions to Reporting

Participants were shown the number of restricted and unrestricted reports that were made at the Academy during the academic year. Sexual Assault and Prevention Response Office's (SAPRO) annual report on the MSAs shows that reports for USNA total 29 (20 unrestricted and 9 restricted). At the time of data collection official reports of sexual harassment were less than five for all MSAs.

During the sessions, outside of some general agreement with questions from the moderators, there was little to no discussion about the reporting of sexual assaults.

## Barriers to Reporting

Although midshipmen participants said they know how to report, they also felt there were many reasons why a student would not come forward and go through the formal or informal reporting process. These reasons varied from fear of retaliation, to lack of privacy, to concerns over one's career prospects.

### **Fear of Punishment**

One barrier to reporting was fear of punishment. Midshipmen participants had reservations about reporting an incident, because for one reason or another, they may get in trouble themselves. Two possibilities were the involvement of alcohol and reprisals.

*“If they were drunk and witnessed it and they weren't supposed to be drinking, it's going to affect a lot because then it's a major problem. It's going to make a restriction, summer trainings, and they could lose a study opportunity. So I think if they're really doing something wrong, but then they witnessed a sexual assault, they might be a little more selfish and not report it because they figure they're going to get in trouble too, even though they weren't the perpetrator.” – Freshman, Male*

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**Alcohol.** As noted earlier, alcohol was a large part of campus life. In some instances, midshipmen participants noted students had alcohol in situations when it was not permitted or they were not of legal age to consume alcohol. Midshipmen participants related that if alcohol was involved in a sexual assault or sexual harassment incident, they may take a pause or have a concern about reporting the offense.

*“I think it goes back to the drinking underage. And certainly an underage person who's been drinking and had something happen, they're going to think twice about reporting it because they know that they were underage drinking, or if their friends were there. I think in situations in which there are multiple layers of repercussions, people tend to think a little bit more about reporting.” – Faculty, Female*

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*“A lot of times I hear, like not necessarily hear, but when we have been like people haven’t reported if they’re underage and drinking because they don’t want to get in trouble for being underage drinking.” – Sophomore, Female*

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### **Fear of Social or Professional Reprisal or Retaliation**

Fear of damage to one’s reputation was one barrier to reporting. Midshipmen participants were concerned about the stigma attached to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. Midshipmen participants expressed that they believed the ranking system sets up barriers to reporting because of potential reputation damage.

*“The ranking [is a barrier to reporting]. Like I said earlier on, they’re too scared to say anything. And you’re in a position where it’s very hard to report them. And you might be scared; you might not trust them, like your upperclassmen. If you don’t have people—depending on your company or squad, if you don’t have a good support system, it’s like a little bit scarier for a Plebe to say, ‘Oh hey, this has happened to me.’” – Sophomore, Female*

*“Rankings [are a barrier to reporting]. Because we have to rank each other at the end of the semester and make comments about people.”*  
– **Upperclassman,**

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Midshipmen and faculty in the focus groups indicated that they believe there was reluctance due to concerns about ruining someone’s career in the military by reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment or any rule infraction. It is viewed as a negative and could possibly violate an unspoken code among the midshipmen, especially if the reporter believes they were a party to creating the situation.

*“There’s an overarching kind of dark code here called don’t bilge your classmates. And so you get things that are in that gray area. And it’s not just—you know, it can be, whether it’s alcohol or any kind of offense, the mids will kind of close ranks and say I’m not going to bilge my classmates out here. It’s kind of a take care of your own code that’s been here for, you know, a long, long time.” – Faculty, Male*

*“I feel like if the victim thinks that they were partly to blame for an incident happening, they were drinking or they were flirting with the person that committed the sexual assault, and they feel like they have a sense of ‘Oh, it was kind of my fault, I don’t want to mess up their career because I was half the reason that happened.’ That might be a reason not to report.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

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### **The Process**

Midshipmen and faculty participants indicated that they believed the process of reporting sexual assault and/or sexual harassment was a stressful and strenuous one. It was both the aftermath of



the reporting and the reporting itself that was viewed as causing the most stress. Faculty and staff in the sessions communicated the length of time for the case to be heard and the victim to be notified causes the most angst. Midshipmen participants said they believe having to answer the constant barrage of questioning and check-ins from high-ranking officers would be very stressful. Another factor related to the process of reporting was a lack of privacy. Student participants expressed that midshipmen were reluctant to report due to the close-quarters living conditions and being fearful of people knowing personal matters when they would prefer confidentiality.

***Strenuous Formal Process.*** The process of reporting was a difficult one. As stated earlier, because of training, the midshipmen participants were well informed on how and where to report. Nevertheless, it was the aftermath of reporting that causes students anxiety.

Faculty participants noted students often did not hear the results of their reported incidents for extended periods of time, if at all. Other faculty in the sessions remarked that the victims are frequently the ones who were moved from classes rather than the alleged perpetrator.

*“I think one thing I’ve heard is how long it takes for a case to get dealt with on the yard, you know... But there are some cases that take a while. And instead of them being on a ship where they separate them on a ship, they just separate them throughout the brigade. So that’s something that they seem to pin on as well. They then might go 18 months, 24 months without any kind of result” – Faculty, Male.*

*“And then on that basis they move the victim [after reporting sexual assault or harassment]. So if the victim is in the class with the perpetrator, the victim is moved out of that class. Which would be a reason not to report, because that’s more disruptive to the victim.” – Faculty, Female*

***Lack of Privacy.*** Lack of privacy was a huge issue on campus, and it could prevent the reporting of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Midshipmen participants said they would be reluctant to report because everyone would find out about the incident. Midshipmen in the focus groups stated they would rather deal with the effects and the trouble themselves than have the company know their business. Faculty members in the sessions agreed with the assertion that privacy was an issue. Faculty participants shared that midshipmen had little to no privacy, and it was a deterrent to reporting.

*“They just don’t want that blight on them. We talked about gossip once you report that, even if it’s supposed to be confidential, it’s like it always, always, always gets out. And then, you know, it spreads like wild fire, and then that individual is just talked about. And I think, you know, they’re just disgraced amongst their peers in the hall. And that’s kind of tough for—you know, picture being 18. That’s tough for an 18-year-old. I think to have to put up with that, you know. So then you have to decide am I going to stay and just deal with it or am I just going to leave because it’s just easier to do that, or I’m just not going to say anything because then no one will know and then I*

*won't be embarrassed or it won't follow me in my military career either."*

– **Faculty, Female**

*"I think I'm actually here because of the amount of female midshipmen who have approached me for that very reason. And they will not say anything. One, because they're worried about backlash for rumors, because as secret as SAPR stuff is supposed to be, it always gets out."* – **Faculty, Female**

*"I think the hardest thing is, instantly everyone is going to know, like in a matter of hours everyone, especially in your company, is going to know that something happened."* – **Sophomore, Male**

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### **Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers**

Midshipmen participants were hesitant to report sexual harassment, because they viewed it as a subjective experience and not as well-defined as sexual assault. Midshipmen participants said they were knowledgeable of the reporting process. However, sexual harassment was viewed as an issue that was usually left to the midshipmen to handle among themselves. Faculty in the focus groups said they believed one reason that midshipmen did not report was a failure to understand what sexual harassment was.

**Unclear Definition.** Midshipmen participants reported that they may not want to report sexual harassment because it was considered a gray area and not well-defined. Faculty participants had a perception that the midshipmen participants did not have a clear definition of sexual harassment and fail to understand the severity.

*"I think people don't know what sexual harassment is and they're weighing the cost-benefit. You know, 'Well, did anything actually happen? And is it worth getting myself socially ostracized for something that I can work through myself?' Whereas a sexual assault I think people are, you know, tending to realize that, 'Hey, I need more help than what I thought.'"*

– **Faculty, Female**

*"I think sexual harassment is one of the more blurrier ones at least at the Academy, because some comments will be construed—like they'll just think it's like a joke or whatever. But there's joking and then—there can be a joke from one perspective, but like from another perspective it's just not okay. And I think that's one of the things that's not addressed here as often, because it is a blurry subject. At the Academy we're really, really good with black and white. But when you get into a gray area, it's more difficult."*

– **Freshman, Female**

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**Midshipman-Level Issue.** Students in the focus groups said they would be reluctant to report sexual harassment because they said they were trained to handle interpersonal conflict at the lowest level. They viewed sexual harassment as something to be handled between midshipmen.

Faculty participants agreed that midshipmen would much rather handle it between themselves than report it and have negative attention.

*“...if someone is a jerk in a non-sexual way to someone, I wouldn’t bring that up to the chain of command. I’d try to handle it. And I’d do the same thing with sexual harassment.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“[Sexual harassment], where it’s a little bit more gray and so you don’t—you would rather just address it with them personally if you feel comfortable enough or that you feel you’re strong enough to address that with them. Whereas some things you feel you need the backup with other people to help you with it.” – Freshman, Female*

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## **Prevalence of Retaliation**

Midshipmen participants reported that they believe ostracism was often a consequence of reporting, and because of the nature of the Academy, there was a real possibility of retaliation occurring through social media or through day-to-day interactions with other midshipmen.

### **Ostracism**

Ostracism and social isolation were identified as fears and potential barriers to reporting. Midshipmen participants indicated that they believe attending the Academy without friends would be nearly impossible and that social isolation would make it difficult to be successful at the Academy.

*“I think that in reading this definition, the ostracism part, I think if you report anything, you will absolutely be ostracized in some way by someone, unless it’s an absolute like clear-cut case of rape, you know.”*

*– Sophomore, Female*

*“If it’s like something within the company and people find out that you reported and they don’t like it, you could get isolated. Your company is pretty much your family. I think if you’re isolated there, you don’t have those people, you couldn’t really get through this place without your best friends, they’re your family. To be isolated here, it’s all downhill. It makes it way harder I think just to get through the time.” – Freshman, Male*

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### **Private Social Media and Retaliation**

Midshipmen participants expressed that if a report were made, social media would be used for retaliation. The now defunct YikYak and Snapchat were the most common social media tools that midshipmen participants reported students would use for retaliation. Most indicated that retaliation took the form of a comment about the person and the situation.

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*“Yik Yak. I think that is one of the worst things for that kind of stuff [gossip]. That’s not there anymore.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## Training and Prevention

Midshipmen participants were asked about the sexual assault prevention training they received at the Academy. The questions ranged from what they were taught to what strategies were used to talk about it. They reported that training was present throughout their tenure as midshipmen at the Academy.

### Effectiveness

Faculty and midshipmen participants indicated that they felt the training at the Academy was effective in providing different strategies for how to identify and prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*“I think it’s great. I think the SHAPE program is well organized. It’s delivered in a small-group setting. They have fleet-experienced people mentoring the session, but they have guides, facilitators from their own peer groups running it. If colleges aren’t studying what that program is and using it elsewhere, I think they’re missing out on a great opportunity.” – Faculty*

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Many midshipmen participants said they felt that training was very effective and feel that they come away from the training sessions better informed than they were before the trainings.

*“Highly [effective training]. I mean when you think that probably a lot of people come into the Academy knowing nothing about reporting or anything like that, I think they’re effective if you consider that probably the majority of midshipmen come in with pretty much no knowledge. It gives a pretty solid foundation.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## Student Training

### Training Mode

Midshipmen participants said they liked the trainings when they were interactive and not of the PowerPoint variety. They felt PowerPoint presentations were not as effective or as appreciated. They felt small groups with the company officers or officers who had experience with the particular issue they were discussing were more effective than a large group viewing a PowerPoint presentation.

*“I’ve heard they like the peer trainings with peer leaders through the Navy sessions, and they like that atmosphere as well.” – Faculty*

*“I’d say the best training I’ve had was the training when I became a SAPR guide. But not everybody goes through that and is forced to deal with that, I*

*think. I sat in a room for eight hours a day and just learned everything, all the data about it, I learned about personal cases. And it just makes it a little more real and instead of just glazing over it and the briefs that we get, it gets down to the nitty-gritty detail, and you learn about the ins and outs of the legal system and socially and how people are actually feeling”*

**– Upperclassman, Female**

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One Love Foundation seemed to present a good training on de-escalation techniques by presenting the material in gender-specific formats. One Love Foundation was an organization designed to promote healthy relationships and presents workshops on identifying healthy relationships versus abusive ones.

*“The Academy signed on with the One Love Foundation, and they do what the mids call de-escalation training, and they did like that. And I know a little bit about the One Love Foundation and I was really pleased that the Academy kind of partnered with them, doing some gender-specific training, so 27th company partnered with 28th company. Just the women, the Youngster women, and then the Youngster men. And they talked about they really liked that. And I was talking to a guy and a woman student, and they both really liked that. So I was pleased with that. You know, it’s not PowerPoints. So they actually were really positive about the trainings.”*

**– Faculty**

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### **Perceived Relevance**

Some midshipmen participants expressed a need for the training to be relevant to their lives at the Academy. They indicated that they appreciated the current training, but felt it would be more relevant and effective if there were examples and situations that applied directly to their lifestyle and situations.

*“Half of them we couldn’t really see as being applicable to us just because I know at least with our SAPR and our SHAPE stuff it always starts off as, well, you’re at the party and so and so does this or so and so does that. We sit there and go okay, here’s what we would do in that instance. But I think it’s altogether different kind of how we are, and it’s not something that we’d really walk away with. I mean you’re a midshipman at the Naval Academy and this happens. So, we don’t really get that a whole lot. So, I don’t think it really helps us much when we are looking kind of as an outsider perspective. That doesn’t have a place here.”* – **Freshman, Male**

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Other midshipmen participants indicated that they found the training to be relevant and reported that it taught them the definitions of sexual harassment and what to be on the watch for in their daily lives. The training also taught them how to self-monitor, and to be aware of their potential to become a harasser.

*“Actually, they are kind of effective in the regard that I think a lot of times sexual harassment occurs when someone doesn’t realize they’re sexually harassing someone. So, our trainings just kind of keep it in the forefront of your mind, like in my every day, I don’t think about sexual harassment. But having these trainings is effective in putting that back into my head and making me think about it, be aware that it is out there. [The training] not only stops me from doing it but kind of helps me keep an eye out for it in my daily life.” – Freshman, Male*

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### **Training Fatigue**

The majority of participants agreed that they received too much training on sexual assault prevention and response. Some expressed that they believed that after a certain point, the training was no longer engaging and students were not paying attention. They said they felt that training on a monthly or quarterly basis was too much. Students in the sessions stated they prefer small-group settings and one-on-one discussions. They did not find PowerPoint presentations that were presented to the entire student body at once effective. Midshipmen carried full schedules, so if they felt their time was being wasted, they would often make jokes concerning SAPR and SHAPE and would not take training seriously.

*“I know from being around the team and I hear them talk about that training that it falls on deaf ears, it’s just another, ‘Okay, we have got another brief.’ And when you hear them talk about briefs, a lot of times they zone out, they just don’t have that focused attention span that they might have in a smaller group setting, you know, in a company setting or, you know, a class setting.” – Faculty*

*“We also get so many briefs about it; people kind of get numb to it. ‘Oh, this is stupid, we have already heard these things 3,000 times, I don’t want to talk about it anymore.’” – Sophomore, Female*

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Some midshipmen participants indicated that they felt that the training, although excessive, was effective in training the students on sexual assault and sexual harassment. They said they found the repetition helpful but frustrating.

*“...if you didn’t come out of the Academy knowing what sexual assault and sexual harassment and that type of stuff is, then somehow you’ve been blind the entire time you’ve been here.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“It is helpful if it raises awareness, but I don’t—I think it’s gotten to the point, at least this year, like, ‘Oh, we have another one like SHAPE session tonight,’ and it just seems like somewhat repetitive. Some of the things we do are eye opening. But I don’t know, it seems like they need to change the way they go about things.” – Freshman, Male*

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## Faculty Training

Faculty members in the focus groups were asked about the sexual assault and harassment training they received. Although the training was appreciated, some felt frustrated with the types of training and suggested they could be condensed to allow the faculty to manage their time better. Additionally, faculty participants were unsure about their roles in terms of mandatory reports and would appreciate more training to clarify their role as mandatory reporters.

*“But give me, this is very military, the five-step, in bold, up top you are not a mandatory reporter if a midshipman comes to you to report a sexual assault. And I don’t think it would have to be that long. But don’t give me a manual, give me some high points ...” –Faculty*

*“I do want to be adequately equipped to respond should this come up, and I do want to know how. Because otherwise it leaves you in a position of hold on, hold on, I’ve had enough training to know that we can’t just proceed full-barrel with this conversation. We all know about restricted and unrestricted reports. We are unsure of our position as mandatory reporters. ...we all know enough to be dangerous.” –Faculty*

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## Training Opportunities

Faculty and midshipmen participants were asked about how to improve sexual assault and sexual harassment training. Several topics and opportunities arose from the discussion on preferences. Recommendations covered types of trainings they would find most beneficial, both from a topic standpoint and how the trainings are administered. Topics of interest included training with scenarios, bystander interventions, and life skills, among others. Midshipmen participants also indicated a preference toward small-group discussions and improving the timing of when they receive trainings.

Faculty and midshipmen participants indicated effective training was the best way to reduce and prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment. Many midshipmen and faculty in the focus groups mentioned the shortcomings of the training programs; they were also quick to mention training has improved from previous years. Training was appreciated most when small groups and relevant guest speakers are employed as training strategies.

**Scenarios.** Midshipmen participants said they wanted to be told real-life situations other officers had experienced. They also would like to hear from victims of sexual assault in order to hear different situations and how those situations occurred. They indicated that they felt having the real-life examples would give them background on how to prevent sexual assault in the future.

*“But one thing I thought was verifiable as far as guest speakers was something that the guides did while they were in training. And this isn’t something we can mandate at all, but it was midshipmen survivors actually came and spoke or people who were graduates, because that really hit close to home. And, you know, a lot of situations that led to the incident were*

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*things that we could all see ourselves in because they were experiences we've all been through. So those were really powerful.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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**Emphasis on Bystander Intervention.** Some faculty participants expressed that they thought midshipmen should be taught what to look for and how to be an active bystander. If the midshipmen participants knew what to look for then they would be more apt to intervene and to prevent a situation from getting out of control. Midshipmen participants tended to agree and would appreciate more training on how to intervene to prevent a fellow classmate from becoming a victim or a perpetrator of sexual assault.

*“I think the bystander intervention is important for them to understand because a lot of times they wouldn't realize that they're a bystander, and then something will happen right under their nose and then after the fact like, 'Oh, I probably should have seen that.' But so many times they don't think it's going to happen to them or they don't think it's going to happen under their purview, and so whatever happens, and then hindsight is 20/20.” – Faculty*

*“I think they seriously lack hands-on training of how to deal with situations, either as a bystander or—well, mostly as a bystander.” – Sophomore, Male*

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**Healthy Relationships.** Faculty and midshipmen participants indicated that an emphasis on what a healthy relationship was and looks like would be beneficial and may help to prevent certain situations. Some midshipmen participants said they would benefit from some training in recognizing warning signs of abuse and unhealthy behaviors in relationships.

*“Maybe we can have what a healthy relationship looks like kind of training. Because I feel like we have a lot of very negative examples. Maybe we can balance it off with this is what a healthy relationship looks like. If this doesn't look like your relationship, then it might be a toxic relationship. I don't know, something along that line, maybe that would help.”*  
– Sophomore, Female

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**Denigration of Males.** Some faculty and midshipmen participants viewed the training negatively because of the way males were portrayed in the examples and the scenarios that were presented. Midshipmen participants understood the examples; however, they were so extreme and the narratives that follow had a tendency to depict males as predatory and lacking any morals regarding females. This specific aspect of training reduced the effectiveness by causing some midshipmen participants to disengage from the training.

*“What gets [a] negative reaction is they're saying that all males are natural predators and we need to avoid becoming predators. And a lot of people take it the wrong way because, you know, no one likes being told that like you're going to be a sexual perpetrator or something like that.”*  
– Upperclassman, Male

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*“Being a male, I feel like I constantly am being attacked when I go to SHAPE.” – Sophomore, Male*

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**Discussions.** Midshipmen participants consistently reported small-group discussions were more effective and allowed for deeper and more authentic training opportunities. Students in the sessions said they were able to focus and participate in smaller groups and did not feel as intimidated to ask questions compared to larger scale trainings.

*“The SHAPE sessions are for the most part taught by other mids, and I feel like it’s not as effective as just one on one or like really small-group discussions.” – Sophomore, Male*

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**Scheduling.** Midshipmen in the focus groups indicated that they felt like there was no optimal time for training. Some mentioned early mornings on the weekend; however, the overarching sentiment was that there is no good time for training, because their schedules were so regimented and full that any time interferes with their studies and activities. Midshipmen participants were appreciative of the training but because of the full complement of activities most of the training was viewed in a negative way.

*“And while it’s super important and while we’re there we have great discussions and like we learn things, it’s one of those things where like it—because it occurs so often, it almost creates an atmosphere where you tend to dread it because you’re like, ‘Oh, I have all these other things I have to do, but I have to go to SHAPE tonight.’” – Freshman, Female*

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## Chapter 4: U.S. Air Force Academy

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A total of ten 90-minute focus groups were conducted at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) between April 18 and April 21, 2017. Of the 10 groups, seven groups were with cadets and three were with faculty. A total of 48 cadets and 30 faculty members participated.

### General Culture

USAFA is located in Colorado Springs, CO, in what students and faculty perceived to be a fairly remote location with restricted access. Cadet and faculty participants viewed USAFA's culture as a blend between both military and civilian influences with a campus that has many similarities to civilian universities and colleges. However, many indicated the demand on the cadets' time and their strictly regimented schedules often make USAFA feel like its own "bubble."

Cadets and faculty in the sessions also attributed the isolation their campus creates as a reason they know each other well. Some indicated this isolation forces them to bond with one another, specifically persons in their squadrons, sports teams, or clubs. As a result, cliques sometimes form and make perceptions and reputations hard to break away from, even after they graduate. As a result, participants believed cadets may be more likely to monitor themselves closely and fear sticking out in any manner.

### Leadership

Participants were asked who they perceived as leaders and influencers on campus.

"Leadership" at USAFA takes many forms. When cadets and faculty in the focus groups were asked who is seen as a leader on campus, responses included military leadership, Academy leadership, and cadet leadership. Air Officer Commanding (AOC), Academy Military Trainers (AMT), and permanent party staff are considered military leadership; the Superintendent and Commandant (known as the "Comm") are the key Academy leaders, whereas cadet company leaders, or wing commanders, are part of student leadership.

*"Depends on what kind of leadership you're talking about. That's why most of the time when you say the word 'leadership,' you tag an extra word behind it. Either you say 'cadet leadership,' 'permanent party,' which are normally considered the AOCs, AMTs. So, I think most of the time when you're talking to a cadet, they very rarely use the word 'leadership.' Normally, it's tagged on with something else, so you know exactly who they're referring to."*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

*"You have both influences, the officer influencing it, and then you have cadet leadership also. Whether it's good or bad influences, I would say that we've all been impacted in some way in our own leadership styles from an officer, or even an enlisted member, as well as a cadet."* – **Upperclassman, Female**

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There was a general consensus from participants that defining leadership is complicated for cadets because they are influenced by Academy leadership, military leadership, and leadership from within the student body. Some considered permanent party or Academy leadership to be most important, whereas others indicated cadet leadership to be most impactful. Those they considered to be influential are members who they interact with most often and who they respect. Influential or “good” leadership was often considered to be people who make an impact, regardless of the level of leadership. Although many participants indicated that they take the permanent party seriously, some indicated that cadets themselves need to buy into the message in order for change to occur.

*“There are many AOCs, which are very hands-off and just let the cadets run the whole thing. I’ve seen my AOC maybe five times in the last semester. But that very much differs from squad to squad. Some squads have AOCs, which are very involved and will always be down with the men and can very much influence the morale, but it just depends.” – Freshman, Male*

*“I think that the officers can make the decisions and tell us what we’re going to do, but the cadets’ attitude is a huge factor in how it actually plays out.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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### **Leadership Communication**

Most participants indicated that information about major events is often received from leadership via trickle-down methods. Some also expressed that there is a lag in communication from leadership, which impacts how cadets perceive the messages that are received from leadership, specifically topics related to gender and sexual assault.

*“I think the real difficulty is not having leadership share everything every time. Something happens but flipping that switch in the cadets’ mind of ‘I didn’t need to know about that, but yes, my leadership does care.’ We’re doing all these things, it’s because they do care. Just because I’m not hearing it, I have to trust that my leadership is doing it. So, because we don’t hear every day, ‘Stop, something happened,’ I think that’s where there could be a little bit of a disconnect as well.” – Faculty*

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### **Leadership’s Attitude Toward Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy**

Participants were asked whether they believe their leadership took policies related to sexual assault and sexual harassment seriously.

The majority of participants indicated they believe their leadership takes these policies seriously because many have noticed more attention paid to the policy compared to previous years and how they discuss the topics during briefings.

*“Research...around sexual assault prevention...the leadership has been tremendously supportive of these projects. In fact, it wouldn’t be where it is*

*today if multiple layers of leadership hadn't listened and helped figure out how to do this." – Faculty*

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Cadets and faculty in the sessions reported they believed leadership takes topics seriously if they hear about the issues directly from them. However, some participants said they felt that leadership sometimes takes topics seriously if they think the issue would reflect badly on the Academy.

*"With authority and leadership there's always the trust factor. Yes, leadership takes it seriously, but leadership also doesn't have any choice but to take it seriously. It is absolutely out in the forefront." – Faculty*

*"They say USAFA is under a microscope, because one bad thing will blow up, and it will look bad on the institution. So I think they're more worried—the message I get is that they're more worried about their reputation, the school's reputation, than actually preventing the action itself."*  
– Sophomore, Female

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## Social Aspects of Academy Life

### Alcohol

Like other Military Service Academies, USAFA's policy on alcohol consumption is fairly strict. However, some cadets and faculty in the focus groups perceived the general alcohol culture at USAFA to be similar to other civilian universities and colleges but with more attention paid to being responsible. Some mentioned that cadets over the age of 21 regularly go to Hap's Place, a bar on campus. Although some said alcohol is a part of the culture at USAFA, many indicated that cadets have to be responsible because they have a lot to lose.

*"When you're of age, it depends on the individual. We have an on-campus bar. Some people will still go to parties. People go on the weekends. But alcohol is a large part of our culture. I don't necessarily know if that's unique to the Academy necessarily. I think that's pretty general for most college-age individuals." – Upperclassman, Mixed Gender*

*"Don't be stupid. Be smart about being stupid, is a big phrase here. If you're going to do something that you could get in trouble for, don't make it super easy to get in trouble. Don't be stupid about it. Be aware. Hold yourself accountable." – Sophomore, Female*

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Other participants indicated they believe alcohol plays a very large role in the lives of cadets for multiple reasons, including stress relief and social expectations. Some cadets in the sessions said they drink to let loose after stressful weeks, whereas others feel pressured to drink when socializing with fellow classmates. As a result, they suggest cadets might forget they are role models or make poor choices.

*“We are all living together, so we should expect some of this, in the same space as them. But at the same time, these are the people that you’re expecting to be your role models and your squadron leadership, and they don’t know how much alcohol is enough for them and when to stop. That’s setting a bad precedent for everyone underneath them. It’s just a cadet thing to do, when you’re 21, just go get hammered.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“It’s viewed as a big stress reliever for a lot of people. Clearly, a Service Academy puts a lot of stress on a lot of people, and the second somebody turns 21 or they become a two degree, they have access to Hap’s or they have a car and can go off base. They take those opportunities to de-stress. They take those opportunities to say, ‘Alright, I’m just going to get away from it and drink as much as I can just so I can get it off of my mind.’”*  
– Sophomore, Male

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**Weekend Alcohol Use.** Although some participants indicated that alcohol is accessible on campus, a large portion considered alcohol use to be more of a problem during the weekend, specifically when cadets are off campus. USAFA is fairly close to major cities in Colorado, specifically Boulder and Denver, where many indicated the majority of alcohol-related incidents occur. Several cadets in the session indicated that these alcohol-related incidents sometimes could lead to the end of potential careers.

*“I don’t think they drink very much during the week, so on the weekend, a lot of people just go all out and go crazy.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“You’ll see a freshman leave on a weekend. They might get one chance to go out for the whole month, so they’re like, ‘We’re going to go to Boulder,’ or ‘We’re going to like CSU or DU.’ Because they’re in situations where they’ve never handled alcohol before, it’s really dangerous because there’s less frequency.” – Sophomore, Male*

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## **Relationships**

Like other Service Academies, USAFA has policies regarding cadet relationships and socializing. For instance, freshmen cadets are prohibited from fraternizing or dating upperclassmen. The Academy also has a policy against cadets dating members in their chain of command. Some participants indicated that these rules are disadvantageous to students who want to develop and learn to have healthy relationships.

*“I think the problem is on more an institutional level, just the way that the Academy addresses relationships and sex and stuff like that. The whole ‘You’re prohibited from having any kind of intimate relationships within the cadet area.’ There’s a rule against that. It used to be presumptive disenrollment, which is kind of ridiculous. But that keeps people from developing healthy relationships, and it creates a position where you’re breaking a rule to have these relationships.” – Freshman, Male*

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Some cadet and faculty participants also described that following recognition (i.e., when freshmen graduate to sophomores), there is a “fresh meat” phenomenon, meaning underclassman are eligible to date students outside of their class year.

*“Once they’re done with recognition and they feel like some of their roles are relaxed, we do see an increase usually in drinking and things of that nature. And then a lot of times with—in terms of dating, there’s a rule: Freshmen can’t date upper class. And so, once they become sophomores, then potentially that opens up the dating pool.” – Faculty*

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### **Communication Among Cadets**

Participants were asked to describe how cadets communicate with each other, as well as how information is spread at the Academy.

The majority of participants indicated that they believe cadets use social media to communicate information to each other. They noted cadets would use social media to convey or highlight topics of interest with their friends or to feel support for opinions they hold and Academy leadership has also used social media to check on the pulse or climate of the Academy.

*“Social media plays that role in making people feel that their voice is heard at the Academy, when sometimes people don’t feel like they have a voice.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

*“Cadets really lean on that as a crutch for support when they’re feeling down and want somebody to support their views or say, ‘Yeah, this sucks too.’ They, a lot of times, turn to that social media.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

*“A lot of the permanent party will, too, just to keep a pulse of what everyone is thinking.”* – **Freshman, Male**

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Both cadet and faculty participants reported that information and rumors spread quickly at USAFA by word of mouth. For cadets in the focus groups, “word of mouth” means both in-person conversations as well as group texts and social media. Many said they believe information spreads quickly because USAFA is a small school, and most of the population knows one another. Jodel, a social media platform, is the tool the participants noted most cadets attribute spreading rumors to.

*“Yeah, word of mouth. Or I’ll text my group, text with friends from different squadrons. ‘Hey, has anybody heard about this?’ Then it extends out through a network. I think you could probably get in touch with any cadet here through one or two people, because everybody knows everybody.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

*“This place has always had a pretty robust rumor mill where—I think the term they use here is what is ‘on the strips.’ I think that’s really been*

*catalyzed. Social media is instantaneous now, whereas before it was something that was word of mouth, or your clique might know. And again, Petri dish/microcosm of society right here.” – Faculty*

*“Word of mouth and Jodel. Jodel, it’s just online word of mouth. It’s anonymous, and you can just post anything, and anyone within a 10-kilometer radius can see it. So whenever the wing is pissed about an inspection, or they’re griping, or they have tests, they’ll just post a Jodel, and a bunch of people will like it.” – Freshman, Male*

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Cadets and faculty in the focus groups shared the same opinion that most students use social media appropriately when their profiles are public. Many expressed that they believe cadets typically adhere to appearing professional on most social media platforms, whereas only a few cadets might be inappropriate through private mediums (e.g., Snapchat) or anonymous social media sites, like Jodel. Participants posited that unprofessional usage is typically done anonymously or privately with the intent to say something negative about another cadet or the Academy. They also noted that anonymity contributes to how safe students feel to be unfiltered when posting negative opinions or harmful information. Although many participants indicated that they believe only a few cadets use social media inappropriately, they acknowledged that when hurtful information is posted about a specific person, it can do a lot of harm to the individual’s reputation.

*“Social media at the Academy is definitely not—like other college kids won’t mind posting a Snapchat with alcohol in it, but I think cadets are really careful. You’re never going to get the full story and stuff. Our lives look pretty perfect if you go on our social media, unless it’s Jodel.”*  
– **Freshman, Female**

*“But once it gets out there—and you don’t know, someone could be posting something on a forum like that, just over and over, and you would think that it’s a lot of cadets who feel that way when really it’s just one person voicing their opinion, and they get a louder voice than they should, and they don’t have any legitimacy because you don’t know who they are or what their background is, anything like that. So I think that’s definitely a big problem at our school. It could be done without.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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## Women at the Academy

Some participants noted there are differences between how older generations of graduates and current students regard gender, impacting how gender is addressed at the Academy. Participants posited that graduates might not be willing to agree with the changes in generational and cultural climate, specifically including women in the military. However, many participants appeared to know the difference between the old and new standards.

*“I see a difference between cadet attitude and permanent party attitude, where some of us grew up when there was more explicit gender bias. And*



*now coming in, these cadets, they don't know what it was like before Title IX and when women rarely got scholarships, those kinds of things. And so from their perspectives, 18- and 19-year-olds coming here, they don't seem to see any explicit, obvious gender bias. At least, that's what they report."*

– **Faculty**

*"Talking with the really, really old graduates, which in some ways shape our Academy. They're part of our heritage, and they're part of the AOG. A lot of times they'll be like, 'Oh, I didn't know that you could be here.' And that's happened to me multiple times in different situations. I'm thinking maybe that's the older perception, but that does influence our institution now. But I think there's more of an attitude that if they're qualified, they can do it once they put on their uniform. If they can do the job, then they can do the job."*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

Some participants indicated that the only “major” differences cadets see between genders at the Academy are their physical test (PT) standards. Otherwise, conversations about “women in combat” are not had, nor are other differences perceived. The majority of cadets in the sessions indicated that they believe that women belong at the Academy and in the military, some caveating that females would need to pull their own weight and meet standards.

*"I would say my experience has been there's not much discussion of it in terms of good or bad. It's more like a black-and-white [situation], this is the way it is now. So there's not much discussion of women in combat, is that good or bad, is it neutral, whatever it is. It's more like women are now in combat; therefore, the next level. Okay, that's the way the military operates now and what do we do. And I think part of that comes just from the military culture where we're told this is how it's going to be, and so then we operate accordingly."* – **Faculty**

*"When it comes to stuff like academics and it comes to stuff like military training, at least in our squadron, for the most part, it's level on that front. Academics: guys do great, girls do great; guys do poorly, girls do poorly. And same for military training. Some girls are great at uniform inspection, and guys are great, and then some girls suck at it, and guys suck at it. It's level across the board. I feel like that's the sentiment that we get in the cadet wing."* – **Sophomore, Male**

Only a few cadets in the focus groups indicated they have heard of others having sexist attitudes or exhibiting sexist behaviors at the Academy, and these gender-based opinions or behaviors are usually discussed in private or posted anonymously to Jodel.

*"It's not overt because that's not the social norm these days. It's all subtle; it's covert; we do it by jokes or, 'Hey, I was only joking. Why can't you take a joke' type stuff. So it's very, just like you said, underground and subtle in the ways that people express their opinions."* – **Faculty**

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*“There’s a lot of informal debates about the standards, I’d say. Maybe not across the wing, but enough to where I’ve seen it. You don’t even have to be an active participant; you just go on Jodel and you’ll see it, complaining about the different AFT and PFT scores for women.” – Freshman, Male*

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## Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

### Definitions

Participants were asked whether they know the definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment. The majority indicated the training they receive on these topics focused on ensuring cadets and faculty know what constitutes sexual assault, resulting in everyone feeling confident in their ability to define sexual assault.

When asked about how to define sexual harassment, participants were more likely to list a wide range of behaviors. Many acknowledged training does not provide a clear understanding of how to define sexual harassment behaviors. The “gray” definitions that participants provided included any gender-related behaviors that are less severe than physical violence.

*“Assault would be any physical contact, and harassment is anything less than that. That’s unwanted and sexual in nature.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“I bet you’d have, in a room of a hundred people, about 75 different answers [in reference to sexual harassment].” – Faculty*

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### General Perceptions

When asked about whether these topics are discussed outside of training, cadets and faculty indicated that general conversations about gender relations most often occur formally, usually following topic-related training. Participants noted that informal conversations about sexual assault or sexual harassment were more likely to occur one on one and were generally a result of cadets feeling accused or upset. Some indicated that conversations about these topics usually do not occur informally because students receive too much training about them.

*“In my experience, not much informal. Maybe after a SAPR brief or something, there will be a little bit. And most of what I hear is ‘Oh, why do we have SAPR briefs? I’m not a rapist; I’m never going to be.’ You complain about it a little bit, and then it just fades away and doesn’t come up until the next SAPR brief.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“I think we’re just so used to hearing everything that people don’t want to talk about it anymore.” – Sophomore, Female*

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Some faculty member participants indicated they try to discuss these topics with their students if they are meaningful to what they are teaching. Otherwise, they do not engage their students in

discussions about gender relations, because it is not relevant to their subject or they feel it is not appropriate.

However, upperclassmen and faculty in the sessions expressed that they believe they participate in discussions about these topics more often compared to previous years as a result of improvements to training and a general change in the Academy's climate.

*"From my freshman year to now, it has changed completely. Like, oh, my gosh. Just incredible. We're heading in the right direction for sure."*

**– Upperclassman, Female**

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Participants were also asked whether they think persons in relationships would be more vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence. Some said they do not see "partner violence" occurring at the Academy, but noted that although they may not see it, partner violence may occur. Other participants said they thought assaults may occur because of miscommunication between friends or persons in a relationship.

*"That gray zone maybe, like if two people have been friends for a long time and one party is interested in making something more out of it and the other one is not, then just miscommunication, and then it turns into something unwanted, where there may have been a basis for friendship, but not anything else. I think that could definitely lead to higher instances of unwanted sexual contact." – Upperclassman, Male*

*"You could be dating someone and consistently sexually assaulting them and not realize it. And maybe it's more black and white than that, but I feel when I hear something like that, especially in the context of a relationship, I think that's possible." – Sophomore, Male*

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## **Sexual Assault**

Many cadets and faculty members in the sessions indicated that they believe the Academy takes the issue of sexual assault seriously and it is an important issue. Participants reported that they felt they know the Academy takes this topic seriously because of the increase in training and awareness compared to previous years, as well as the restructuring of the reporting process.

Although many participants indicated they feel safe at USAFA, they also explained that it is important, when creating friend groups or going out that cadets find people that they can trust completely: cadets that will "have their back." Several faculty members and female cadets in the sessions agreed that trust in friends should be earned over time and cadets should hold themselves accountable.

*"You have to trust the people that you're going out with. You can't just go out with random people and expect them to protect your back. Just that sense of trust that you have with close friends, you have to have that before you go." – Sophomore, Female*

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*“I would say you have to take time to cultivate the friendships or make sure that you’re never put in a situation where you would question the friendships that you have. So I know if I’m not going out with a person that I know really well, if I don’t know the DD [designated driver] really well, if I don’t know the people really well, that’s my limit. I’m not going to be drinking a lot, maybe half a glass, if that. I think you have to spend time to cultivate those.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

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Some cadet and faculty participants indicated USAFA’s focus on sexual assault prevention has led to many cadets purposefully choosing to not interact with other cadets out of fear, suggesting there is a potential for “hypersensitivity” towards awareness about sexual assault.

*“Some guys are really hesitant to—‘What if this is too far?’ Especially if you’re just trying to start dating someone, what if they see your advances as harassment? So I feel like that’s part of it, too, is there’s this kind of hypersensitivity around it possibly becoming a [Sexual Assault Response Coordinator] SARC case that some guys will just refuse to even try.”*  
– **Freshman, Male**

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### **Sexual Harassment**

Potentially because sexual harassment is harder for cadets and faculty to define, participants indicated it is particularly hard to tell when sexual harassment is occurring. This was also reflected in the participants belief that it would be uncomfortable to tell a person that they are sexually harassing them; the line between joking and sexual harassment may be difficult to navigate. Some indicated that trying to begin relationships is also more difficult as a result of ambiguity. Cadets in the sessions mentioned that discussing sexual harassment boundaries with male cadets more frequently might be an opportunity for the Academy.

*“I was the one given the charge to go talk to [a cadet] about, ‘You need to be careful with touching and hugging and all that kind of stuff.’ And I think it’s hard because I know people who are like that, who give lots of hugs, give lots of pats on the back and the shoulder, and they don’t see themselves as perpetrators. I don’t want to call them ‘perpetrators’ because it really is innocent behavior.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

*“And then, you know, especially trying to start dating someone, the fear of, ‘Oh, is this going to be seen as too much? Is this going to be harassment if I stop by her class and take her back to her dorm room? Is that going to be stalking?’”* – **Freshman, Male**

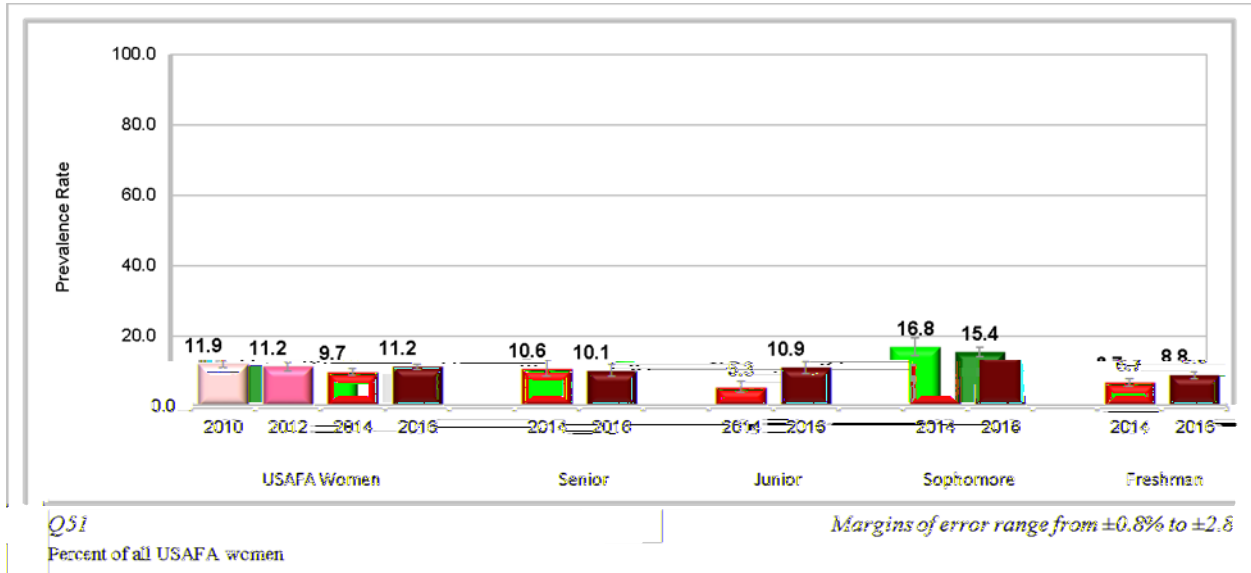
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### **Participants to Perceptions on Survey Results from the 2016 SAGR**

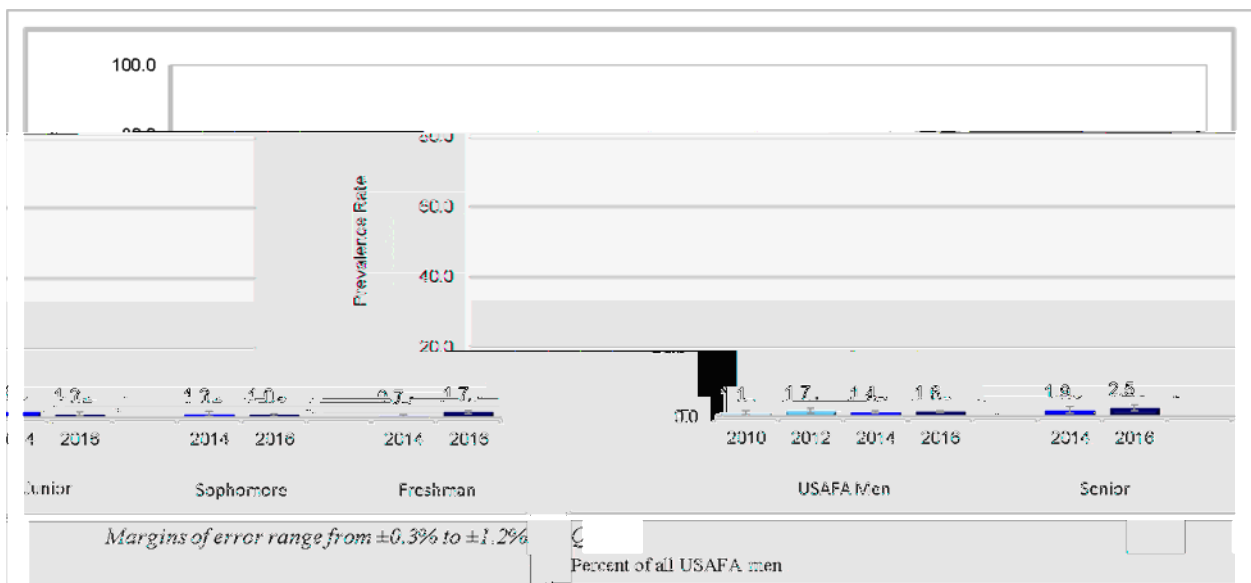
During the focus group session, participants were given a handout containing survey results from the 2016 Service Academy Gender Relations Survey (2016 SAGR). Findings from the 2016 SAGR included data noting the percentage of cadets who indicated experiencing unwanted sexual

contact (USC) during the 2015–2016 academic year broken out by gender and class year (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

**Figure 6.**  
*Percentage of USAFA Women Who Indicated Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Contact, by Class Year and Survey Year*



**Figure 7.**  
*Percentage of USAFA Men Who Indicated Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Contact, by Class Year and Survey Year*



## General Reactions

Overall, a number of cadets and faculty in the focus groups acknowledged that sexual assault occurs at the Academy, as it does at other universities and colleges; however, they were unable to envision what a sexual assault would look like at USAFA because they did not have a frame of reference. Very few participants knew a cadet who had been affected by a sexual assault and were surprised by the percentage of people who indicated experiencing these behaviors as a result.

*“At least for me, I know that there is a problem because I’ve seen the numbers. But it’s hard for me to understand where the problem is because at least the people that I see on a day-to-day basis, like my friends aren’t those people, at least the people that I know. Or at least if they are, I don’t know it. It’s a tough thing to know when you’re not the person.”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

*“I don’t know. We always talk about it, but it’s never this number of people. It’s just always like, ‘It happens, you know. Just trust us, it happens.’ But that’s a lot of people, though. Especially here, because it’s such a small school and everybody knows everybody, so you don’t think about it, I guess.”*

– **Freshman, Female**

In reaction to 2016 SAGR data, other cadets and faculty in the sessions shared their thoughts about why there does not seem to be change in the prevalence rates over the years. Some participants indicated the lack of change may be a result of people knowing unacceptable behaviors and feeling more comfortable reporting them, whereas others perceived the survey results to be reflective of the Academy’s historical culture. Some in the groups were also unsure about the accuracy of prevalence rates because of the amount of training they receive.

*“But the overall percentage each year not changing is concerning, especially because we go to four or five, maybe even six SARC briefings a year.”*

– **Freshman, Male**

*“What that tells me is it’s not a problem with cadets so much. It may be part of the cultural heritage that’s passed on from class to class. That may be what’s causing it to continue throughout the years. But you should be able to change that through briefings and stuff like that.”* – **Freshman, Male**

*“I know in all of the briefings they like to say the numbers are going up, because people are more confident to come forward. Not knowing anyone who’s gone and reported anything, I want to believe that, because I like to believe in the system. I don’t have a firsthand account of whether or not that’s true.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

## Class

**Freshmen.** Freshmen at USAFA are restricted from participating in many activities with other class years, including fraternization. Cadets in other class years, therefore, know not to engage freshmen in fraternization as there might be severe penalties, including expulsion. As a result, freshmen are isolated from the rest of the cadet corps. Therefore, many participants were not surprised that the USC rates for freshman men and women were low.

*“I think it’s really good that the freshman rates are lower, though. That’s a testament to the success, to some degree, of the no fraternization policy.”*

– **Sophomore, Male**

*“I would say, right now, we can’t really talk to any of the upperclassmen. We can talk to them and be friends with them, but anything past that, you can’t hang out outside of here with them. It’s called frat. Sophomores and upperclassmen can get kicked for it. Freshman, you’ll get in trouble, but you won’t get kicked out. So, I feel like that could definitely be like a factor in that.”* – **Freshman, Female**

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**Sophomores.** The 2016 SAGR revealed sophomores, specifically women, had the highest USC rate. When reviewing these prevalence rates, participants were unsurprised by the jump, noting when freshmen graduate to sophomores, or are “recognized,” they are seen as “fresh meat” and are allowed more freedom. This “Shark Week” is a phenomenon many participants described as a potentially vulnerable period for sophomores, as once they go through recognition, they might be more susceptible to upperclassman.

*“In my mind it makes sense that the sophomores have the highest. Just because freshman year, you’re in a box and you can’t really do anything. And then sophomore year comes, and then you go a little crazy.”*

– **Sophomore, Female**

*“The thing that has jumped out at me is that the sophomore year is a little bit higher than the rest. The cadets’ freshman year, they’re essentially in a training status all year and their schedule is very structured. And once they’re done with recognition and they feel like some of their roles are relaxed, we do see an increase usually in drinking and things of that nature. In terms of dating, there’s a rule: freshmen can’t date upper class. And so, once they become sophomores, then potentially that opens up the dating pool.”* – **Faculty**

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**Upperclassmen.** The lower 2016 SAGR estimates for USC rates for upperclassmen relative to sophomores were not surprising for cadets and faculty in the focus groups. Some participants also indicated upperclassmen are either too busy with work or too afraid of severe punishments to perpetrate or participate in these behaviors. Others believed the rates were related to the length of time cadets have been at the Academy, as students may know each other’s boundaries better.

*“The percentage of girls here is so small, that by the time a woman is a firstie, they’ve probably been approached by so many guys that they either have a boyfriend or they’ve established that they don’t want that and it’s not going to happen at all.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“For juniors and seniors, I think it’s just busyness. They don’t have the time to pursue relationships, especially junior year, because you start having a lot [of] military duties. You’re now a leader. You have a lot of classes. Junior year is one of the harder years here, just overall. So I think that’s what drives the number down for junior year, is you don’t have time to worry about stuff like that, any kind of relationship. You don’t get into situations where you might come to experience unwanted sexual contact.” – Freshman, Male*

## Gender

While reviewing the survey data by gender, cadets and faculty in the sessions described reasons why there are differences between male and female prevalence rates.

**Female.** Gender differences between USC rates were most often described by participants as being the result of “aggressive men” or miscommunication. In regards to sexual harassment, some indicated male cadets may not know their behavior toward females is inappropriate. Also, because of the proportional difference between the amount of men and women, some participants indicated they felt female cadets receive more attention.

*“I was talking to one friend, and she basically said with the exception of maybe two or three people, she doesn’t have any male friends here that haven’t ever hit on her before. Truly, go to a school with 80% men and have less than three relationships where the person hadn’t hit on them. That sucks. I wouldn’t really want to be in that situation. So when I look at those numbers, I’m not entirely surprised, to be honest.” – Sophomore, Male*

**Male.** When asked about the USC rates for male cadets, the majority of participants said they were lower than the female rates because men do not know how to classify these behaviors if they are experienced. Some participants indicated that they believe male cadets may interpret or rationalize behaviors to meet societal expectations and others indicated that they believe men do not want to admit they have experienced gender-related behaviors because of potential shame or feelings of emasculation.

*“I feel like they don’t classify it like women do. I have some friends who are guys here. They tell stories about when they were at a party and this girl was coming on very strong to them and they were just not having it. But, you know, it’s a joke. It’s not sexual assault. It’s a joke.” – Sophomore, Female*



## Multiple Offenses

Participants were given detailed results from the 2016 SAGR that highlighted estimates for cadets who indicated experiencing USC and indicated the incident occurred more than once. Participants were also shown estimates for cadets who had experienced multiple incidents that involved the same offender (Table 4).

**Table 4.**

**Percentage of USAFA Students Who Indicated Experiencing Multiple Incidents of Unwanted Sexual Contact and Indicated the Same Offenders Were Involved**

Of those who experienced USC since June 2015	Women	Men
Experienced more than one incident	62%	72%
Same offenders were involved	38%	44%

Cadets and faculty in the sessions reported they believe that if a person experienced multiple offenses, the perpetrator would most likely be the same person. Many also indicated they felt these instances might have occurred because of miscommunications within a relationship. However, some participants were surprised there were situations involving multiple offenders.

*“Going back to these numbers, what really concerns me is the discrepancy between the two rows. Sixty to 70% said they experienced more than one incident, but only 40% said it was the same offenders involved. So that means there are multiple offenders doing these multiple things. We like to think there’s only a few bad apples and only a few people doing this, but these numbers may be indicating something a little different, that there are multiple people doing these things to one person.”*

– **Upperclassman, Mixed Gender**

*“I see the multiple offenses, for me that implies a relationship where they’re not comfortable doing that stuff but they don’t want to say ‘no.’ I feel like it’s not isolated. Repeated offenses involve someone you know very well and you’re almost in a relationship with and you’re just not comfortable telling them ‘no.’ In my opinion, at least.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

## Bystander Intervention

Cadets and faculty members in the focus groups were asked what they believe most students at USAFA would do if they saw a situation where a sexual assault was about to occur.

The majority of participants said a cadet would intervene and stop the behavior immediately, specifically if they knew the cadet involved. Many said they believe cadets are responsible for each other, and that if something were to occur, it would reflect badly on themselves and the Academy.

*“In my experience, 99% of the people here would, in a heartbeat, be like, ‘Get out of here.’ They would absolutely step in.” – Freshman, Female*

*“I guess the point is we get it stopped. We’re not going to accept it. We wouldn’t accept it in our squad. If that was happening, we would find a way to stop it. I guess the point here is that nobody wants to get anybody else in trouble and say, ‘It’s just a guy getting stupid.’ We want to get him to stop without getting him in trouble and making him understand that it’s not cool before we try to get somebody else involved.” – Sophomore, Female*

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However, a few participants indicated they would not intervene because they would be afraid of getting another cadet in trouble or being a “buzzkill.”

*“So you bring up the wingman concept. I think it’s been corrupted from its original intention. I think all cadets right now are ‘cooperate and graduate, operation graduation,’ and so they protect each other. Cadets are either scared or there’s another mantra: Snitches get stitches. So if you’re out with your friends and they’re doing something wrong, are you going to be a good bro? Are you going to keep it silent and help them out? Or are you going to tell on them? Well, if you tattle on them, there’s a bad result from that.”*

– Faculty

*“People don’t even want to step in when people are making inappropriate comments or something, because the way other people will react to it.”*

– Upperclassman, Male

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Many participants also noted that a situation would need to be very clear, because if ambiguity is involved (e.g., not knowing relationship dynamics, not clear if the situation is risky, alcohol use), many posit that cadets would be less likely to step in. Freshmen and sophomores in the sessions also reported that they think correcting upperclassmen would be awkward and, therefore, would not attempt to intervene if a junior or senior were involved.

*“I think it’s difficult when friends are involved, because sometimes you don’t know. Maybe my friends want to be together, or maybe they don’t. It’s just difficult to tell in a situation like that.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“There’s a stigma in the Air Force that spreads to the Air Force Academy as well about correcting superiors on anything. I’ve seen my squad com—we’re not supposed to have our white shirt showing. It would be a pretty quick fix, but especially before recognition, there’s a very low chance I’m going to say anything. It’s not that big of a deal. If it’s hard to correct someone’s uniform, imagine the difficulty in correcting someone on something like that. ‘Excuse me, sir, pardon me, please.’”*

– Freshman, Male

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## Role of Alcohol

Participants were asked to describe what “high risk” situations look like at USAFA. The majority of cadet and faculty participants indicated alcohol plays a large role in whether a situation is “high risk” for a sexual assault to occur, especially when alcohol is consumed off campus, in local cities, and nearby campuses. Some described that consuming excess amounts of alcohol puts a cadet at risk because they lose their ability to judge a situation or make informed decisions.

*“Most of the stories that I’ve heard involve alcohol. But it seems like when something does happen, alcohol is involved.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“That’s the effect that alcohol has, is it removes inhibition, it lowers your ability to control yourself. And the second that that idea pops into your head, no matter how much training you’ve had, no matter how many voices are telling you maybe this is not a good idea, you drink enough alcohol, you’re going to lead yourself to a bad decision. Just having it present, it’s always going to be an issue.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“Not every time you drink there’s going to be a sexual assault, and not every sexual assault is the result of alcohol, but I think that there’s never a good relationship between the two.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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As a result of both training and the comradery students feel toward each other, participants indicated cadets look out for one another when in risky settings. Some said they felt that they are especially mindful of female cadets when they go out, so nothing unwanted happens.

*“We’ve learned to have situational awareness no matter what state that we’re in. It’s just something that we’ve learned, you just kind of have to look out for everyone else and look out for yourself.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“We’re in an Air Force with women. We’re in squadrons with women. And women going to Boulder, I’m not saying it’s our responsibility in terms of we should be accountable, but it is our responsibility to protect and make sure that that doesn’t happen, even if it’s not us individuals, like the ones doing the actions. I think it’s just as important because they’re members of our fighting force. And whether that happens here or somewhere else, from someone in the military or not.” – Sophomore, Male*

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Some students and faculty in the sessions also noted alcohol use could lead to confusing situations for cadets. Some identified consent as “gray” or hard to establish when alcohol is involved, which may play a role in whether students know how to handle situations. Some participants also indicated this lack of clarity might contribute to the continuation and propagation of “myths” at the Academy.

*“It impairs communication about consent and it lowers inhibitions, and I think it contributes to the rape myth, that women will report sexual assault because they regretted what happened the night before. That is a rape myth that you hear a lot around here. I’ve heard it from a lot of different sources.” – Faculty*

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Cadets and faculty in the focus groups also shared they are not confident in their knowledge about consent and alcohol use. Many indicated they felt they had received contradictory information about whether consent can legally occur when alcohol is consumed.

*“We get all these different indicators of ‘This is what the absolute line that you can’t cross is.’ They’ll say, ‘No alcohol, not even a sip.’ So you hear they have to actively say ‘yes,’ oh, they just have to be conscious, oh, they just can’t resist. You get all these people telling you this is what it means to cross the line, this is crossing the line, and you’ve got a bunch of different lines.” – Freshman, Male*

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## Other Factors in Sexual Assault or Sexual Harassment

### Location

As discussed above in the section regarding the role of alcohol, many students and faculty in the sessions indicated that they believe sexual assault is unlikely to occur on the USAFA campus; the majority of participants believe risky situations occur off campus in surrounding cities and campuses. Freshmen and sophomores in the focus groups were more likely to think that incidents of sexual assault would not occur on campus because there is no privacy and that students would not have the opportunity.

*“If you go to a different college and you’re partying and getting drunk with other people. I don’t think it will happen here in the dorms.”*  
– Sophomore, Female

*“Here it’s kind of like tricky. We’re all so close together. It would probably be off campus. I can’t think of really any other place.”* – Freshman, Female

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Several participants said they feel incidents are likely to occur in Boulder, CO. Because it is relatively nearby, they said students may feel free to “let loose” while off campus and have opportunities to abuse alcohol while there.

*“It just seems like every time there’s a high-profile criminal case with a cadet in it, it happened in Boulder.”* – Upperclassman, Male

*“It’s more like Boulder or DU. That’s where the incidents are happening when you’re drunk there.”* – Sophomore, Female

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## ***Issues Related to Safety***

Participants also noted situations in which they might feel unsafe in their dorm rooms, including situations where upperclassmen have returned from a night out and are intoxicated. Many participants recalled instances in which students have entered the rooms of other cadets and some indicated they would like to have the ability to lock their doors.

*“People will come back from Hap’s and they’ll be really drunk, and they’ll go in the wrong room. They’ll fall asleep in somebody else’s bed or something else will happen. Sometimes you should lock your doors on the weekends.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“One thing that we’ve talked about is the cadets not being able to lock their doors and how there have been incidents where male cadets or female cadets have stumbled in the wrong rooms, just not being able to have that protection of privacy is an issue in my mind.” – Faculty*

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## ***Reputation***

In the focus groups, cadets and faculty members indicated a cadet’s reputation might also influence their chance of experiencing gender-related behaviors. A poor reputation appeared to impact female cadets more than males, and poor reputations can be long lasting. Participants noted that reputation could impact both how a cadet is treated and how they are perceived: a cadet whose personal dating information is public may be perceived by others as someone who is open to non-committed relationships with a variety of partners.

*“I think reputations are really big here. If a girl has a reputation, it’s not going to leave. It’s going to stay with her, and there’s nothing she can do about it. That is, I would say, the number one problem for gender relations: reputation. The girl can get labeled as something.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“Say a female cadet dates several male cadets. At this point, she gets labeled, and then the other females do not let up. They just hammer her.” – Faculty*

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## **Reporting and Retaliation**

### **Familiarity with Reporting Options**

Similar to the knowledge about defining sexual assault, participants were very familiar with the procedures for reporting sexual assault. Some indicated that even if reporting procedures were not memorized, they would know where to find information about them.

Participants discussed which type of report, restricted or unrestricted, a victim would most likely make if they were to choose to make a report.

Some cadets in the focus groups indicated they would get feedback from the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) or Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) office before committing to either an unrestricted or restricted report. These participants indicated they would trust the SARC office personnel more than military personnel at the Academy to help them navigate through the process.

*“For me, if I had something to report, I probably would go to the SARC office first and talk to them about it, and then decide if I want to go unrestricted or restricted or stay restricted. That’s probably how I would do it and most people would do it. I don’t think most people would go to their AOC first. I’m not comfortable with my AOC or with my AMT. I guess some people would go to the chaplain.” – Sophomore, Female*

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However, some faculty members in the sessions indicated that they believe cadets do not trust personnel from the SAPR office. They said they think cadets see the SAPR office as an entity that causes them to receive punishment, even though they agree it is a myth.

*“I think that stigma in general and the rumor mill, where there could be in some cases negative attitude towards any helping agency, a lot of cadets who may be in the process of being dis-enrolled for various reasons may have been engaged in a helping agency, whether it’s SAPR, counseling services, whatever. So there’s this link that if you seek helping agencies, it could lead to a negative outcome. That’s not true; that’s just a perception that some cadets have. And I think that’s a barrier of care, because you have someone who may have heard a story, someone who may have all kinds of problems and they’re being dis-enrolled and the reason they were getting help is different from why they’re being dis-enrolled.” – Faculty*

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## **Student Groups**

Cadets at USAFA have access to the Personal Ethics and Education Representative (PEER) program, which is a volunteer, cadet-run program. PEERs are not given the authority to take a restricted report, but they are available to provide support. All cadet squadrons are equipped with two PEERs who are trained to be a referral source for cadets in need of help. A few cadets and faculty members in the focus groups noted PEERs are trustworthy resources, although it depends on the squadron as to whether the PEERs are taken seriously.

*“I think cadet peers and cadet leadership would be important. I mean, it’s literally called ‘PEER,’ right? They have a program in place where, again, they have trusted agents in their squadrons they can bring these issues to. I think it’s important to have that at their level as well.” – Faculty*

*“They’re just there for you. You can go talk to them if you’re struggling with school or with this or with anything, really, or if they can’t talk about it, they can point you in the right direction if you need somebody to talk to.”*  
– Freshman, Female

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## Reactions to Reporting

Participants were shown the number of restricted and unrestricted reports made at the Academy during the academic year. SAPRO's annual report on the MSAs shows that reports for USAFA total 33 (20 unrestricted and 13 restricted). At the time of data collection official reports of sexual harassment were less than five for all MSAs.

Many cadets and faculty members in the focus groups expected victims to choose to make a restricted report rather than an unrestricted report. Many reported they felt restricted reports offer the necessary privacy a victim would want, which allows for time to process, receive treatment, and avoid rumors. Some participants described that victims who make an unrestricted report could lose control over the report because their chain of command becomes involved, potentially resulting in the incident becoming public.

*"It wouldn't surprise me if the restricted reports are slightly higher. Because in both cases, but specifically for guys, part of the big barrier is the publicity that comes out of it. So if you can file a restricted report, you can at least deal with it privately, unless or until you feel the need to go public with it. Versus if the first report is unrestricted, right away you know that people are going to find out. If law enforcement gets involved, your chain of command gets involved."* – **Freshman, Male**

*"I think you're going to get a lot more restricted. I'm kind of surprised that there's that many unrestricted, just because you don't really want to start stuff here, because everyone is so close that everyone knows."* – **Sophomore, Female**

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Generally, participants indicated they were unsurprised that no formal complaints of sexual harassment were made. Reports of sexual harassment are made through the Equal Opportunity Office (EO), which is separate from the SAPR office. Therefore, SAPR training at the Academy may not include information relevant to sexual harassment. Some participants indicated potential offenders in these situations may only need to be told they are being inappropriate for the behavior to stop.

*"I'm not surprised about the zero on sexual harassment. Because nobody thinks it's that big of a deal, no one is going to report someone for it. A lot of times, if it is seen as an issue, it's handled at the lowest level possible, taking it up the chain of command. Because a lot of times people are willing to change. If someone corrects them, saying, 'Hey, don't make jokes like that, that offends me,' or 'That could be seen as sexual harassment,' people will stop, especially here."* – **Freshman, Male**

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## Barriers to Reporting

### *Fear of Punishment*

Many cadets and faculty members in the focus groups reported that they believe a key reason victims might not report is because they are afraid of potential consequences from collateral misconduct. For example, underage drinking and fraternization were most often referenced by participants as barriers to reporting because students do not want to get in trouble for participating in prohibited behaviors. Few participants were aware of a change in policy at the Academy that would allow for a lighter penalty for other violations that might have occurred during the incident.

The majority of participants indicated that a major barrier to reporting would be if the victim were drinking, as victims could be afraid of potential repercussions for these violations, specifically if underage. Therefore, some cadets and faculty members in the sessions indicated if victims were to report, in situations involving alcohol, they would most likely make a restricted report.

*“Not to say that anything that happened is your fault, but it’s like an unrelated thing. This happened to me, but it also happened to me while I was at a party where I was drinking underage, for example. People were so scared of getting in trouble themselves if they report it, the sexual assault, that they might just not want to report it at all because they don’t want to get in trouble for whatever they were doing.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“A lot of decisions here are made in response to not getting in trouble. There’s so many ways that you can get in trouble. On any aspect here, that people are going to go the route that doesn’t get them in trouble.”  
– Sophomore, Female*

Some participants indicated alcohol consumption is a barrier to reporting because it would potentially add to the “grayness” of the situation. For example, some said they felt they would not report if they had been drinking alcohol because they believe authorities or peers would not believe them.

*“It definitely adds another layer of confusion to an already difficult decision to make, like whether or not (a) it happened, from your point of view, and (b) whether you want to report it. And when you throw in, ‘Oh, I was seven drinks in, which I took in the past 30 minutes, maybe I saw things wrong and maybe it wasn’t this and that.’ And then once you get that doubt going, it seems that it’s just going to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and you’ll just sit in indecision and never make the choice to go report anything.”  
– Upperclassman, Male*

Some participants also reported they believe alcohol misuse is a barrier to reporting because victims would not want to get other people in trouble. Many indicated incidents were likely to



occur when groups of cadets are together and drinking. If a victim were to report an offense, the other cadets in the scenario who were not involved in the assault but were drinking would also get into trouble.

More generally, many cadets and faculty members in the sessions indicated a general fear of getting someone in trouble is a barrier to reporting. Some indicated reporting could lead to the end of an alleged offender's career, and some mentioned that situations might result from miscommunication instead of a malicious act. Other participants said they believe that because the cadets are so close to each other, they would prefer to handle situations at the lowest level to keep the "for the boys" attitude, or to ensure they all graduate together.

*"They're all just friends, too. A lot of stuff happens. They are close. They're all here all of the time. If something happens off base, downtown is one thing, but if your friends that you've been doing all of this stuff with, you want to solve it at the lowest level to keep anyone from getting in trouble."*

– **Faculty**

*"I feel like part of the reason that you have this fierce 'for the boys' mentality is it's sometimes super easy, for even the allegation, to just destroy someone's career, livelihood, friends, whatever. So I feel like that's part of the culture that plays into it."* – **Freshman, Male**

### ***Fear of Social or Professional Reprisal or Retaliation***

Some participants indicated that a barrier to reporting is how the victim might feel their reputation will be affected. They indicated a victim's reputation might be impacted by how others treat them and whether they are included in Academy activities. For example, they may become isolated because other cadets are warned to stay away from them. Some participants also noted that rumors spread very quickly at the Academy, and a person's information would be available across the population easily. Therefore, a victim could potentially be labeled for reporting, and cadets would most likely take sides.

*"You could ruin your reputation. If somebody sees you as 'Oh, she got them in trouble for this,' and they didn't think he deserved it, then that rumor spreads and you're known as an untrustworthy person."*

– **Sophomore, Female**

*"I think that the ramifications of what could happen to that individual or those groups of people who engage in that type of behavior, because it is so heavy here at the Academy, there might be less likelihood that somebody would report it because they know what would happen, and so maybe more inclined to wait until they're out of this fishbowl to talk with someone or ask for help or report."* – **Faculty**

*"I think there's definitely fear of reprisal. I think everyone knows your friends have your back, but even so, you—still in the back of your head, you're worried because everything is such an image game here, and you're*

*worried about what is going to happen when you step out of line and throw mud at someone in that way.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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According to participants, harm to one’s reputation could also have potential implications for their career in the Air Force and their ranking at the Academy.

*“So then you get labeled. And I think that’s a very hard thing, because then you will spend your next three years, and even after that, trying to fight against that.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“A lot of people want to fly here. Some people are concerned that if you report it, they’ll get a mental health evaluation. They might consider you unfit to fly. That might be a barrier in terms of it may negatively affect your career, in terms of what you can do, if you report it. And they look at you like damaged goods. They’re like, ‘No, something’s wrong. Your mental health isn’t there.’ It might restrict you to certain career fields. I think that might be a big barrier. People don’t want their careers to be affected, which I think it’s a real possibility if you do report.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“It’s easier to just live with the assault and not get kicked out of here, especially once you cross the commitment line.” – Sophomore, Male*

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Another barrier to reporting described by cadets and faculty during the focus groups was that cadets want to “fit in” at the Academy, meaning they do not want to stand out or be too different from their peers. This was true for both male and female cadets in the sessions. Some indicated that male cadets would not report because they would feel emasculated.

*“I think along with the masculine perception, it’s very un-masculine to be a victim, so people don’t want to report it. I personally know three males who have been sexually assaulted in some way or another, and two of them have only told other female friends and never anyone in their military chain of command or never another male because they’re afraid of being perceived as weak and non-masculine and not being able to defend themselves, when they might have just been in an uncontrollable situation.”*

*– Upperclassman, Female*

*“Anonymous surveys help to improve this situation, but guys, more than girls, are a lot less willing to go up to someone and admit that they’ve experienced this, because there’s this stigma or culture of you were too weak to prevent...it’s like a feminine thing. So, if you are a victim of that as a guy, you’ve lost some masculinity.” – Freshman, Male*

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Similar to concerns about career, some participants indicated the culture around victim-blaming might impact a victim’s decision to report. Participants believed victims may endure hostility from friends of the alleged perpetrator, as well as disbelief from other students. Some also indicated a victim may not trust the system because of past cases at the Academy.

*“Speaking if I was sexually assaulted, I don’t know if I would want that to—regardless of what would happen to a career—even culturally, you’re going to get people, undoubtedly, who are like, ‘Oh, I heard it didn’t even happen. Maybe he was just overreacting.’ So I wouldn’t feel inclined to report it, I don’t think.” – Sophomore, Male*

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## **The Process**

Cadets and faculty members in the sessions indicated the overall process of reporting may be a deterrent to reporting sexual assault. Some believed that the reporting process is too long, whereas others discussed that they would not be believed or nothing would be done as a result of their report. Other participants indicated that cadets are encouraged to handle situations themselves, whereas some believe information would not be kept private, thus being a deterrent to reporting.

***Strenuous Formal Process.*** Cadets and faculty members in the focus groups explained that a victim may not report because of the length of the reporting process. Some believe that because the process takes so long, students would resist reporting because of the impact to the work they have or their ability to graduate on time. Other participants said they felt that because the process takes so long, it would not allow a victim enough time to heal.

*“We’re busy here. We all do stuff all day, every day. So if we can move on personally, we’re going to do it. We’re not going to spend time to make a point. We don’t have time to make points. We’re going to move on if we can.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“Your cadet career doesn’t stop if you report something like that. So now, you’re piling this on top of classes, military duties, athletic requirements. So I don’t think anybody who’s a victim is going to say, ‘I don’t have the time to deal with this,’ but it’s more about stress, can I deal with this on top of all of this.” – Freshman, Male*

*“Another barrier is some people just want to get past it. And by reporting it, you have to bring it up again and talk about it until a whole bunch of people who are above you in your chain of command. You just want to get it over with. I guess that’s another barrier.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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Several cadets in the sessions explained that a victim would not report because, at the Academy, they are all expected to handle situations themselves, at the lowest level. Many of the cadets in the focus groups referenced cadets as being “Type A” and are, therefore, motivated and not willing to be defeated, and indicated this motivation would most likely impact their decision to report because they would force themselves to “get over” the experience.

*“We’re all very gung-ho, independent, ‘No, I can handle my problems myself.’ So that could carry over into this. Even in a situation like this where you should talk to someone after the first time and get help because*

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*it's too big for you to try to deal with on your own. You could still have that mentality of 'No, it's fine. I can get through it.'*” – **Sophomore, Male**

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**Lack of Privacy.** Participants indicated a major deterrent to reporting sexual assault is a perceived lack of privacy. Some explained that victims would probably prefer for their experience to remain private because of a sense of shame, or not wanting their family and friends to find out. Some also noted victims might be afraid to report because of how quickly rumors spread.

*“I feel like if they didn't report...it would be because they personally felt like they didn't want anybody to know. I could see if one person finds out, you don't know who else is going to find out, honestly. It's a small school, and you're going to go here for a while. You don't want it to be 'You're that girl.'”* – **Freshman, Female**

*“As much as they say don't discuss it after you leave this room, they live and eat and go to class and do everything in such close quarters, they know everything that goes on, so I mean, it always gets out. No matter how heavily it's stressed, don't say anything, it always gets out.”* – **Faculty**

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### **Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers**

As mentioned, some participants found it difficult to define sexual harassment, and therefore, believe identifying and reporting situations in which sexual harassment occur would be difficult.

**Unclear Reporting Process.** Although the majority of participants indicated they were clear about the procedures for reporting sexual assault, many were unsure about how to report sexual harassment. Confusion stemmed from a variety of aspects to reporting, including with whom they would file a report and what threshold a behavior would have to pass to constitute being reportable. Participants also explained that reporting options for experiencing sexual harassment are not included in their training.

*“It's not a very clear path on who you would talk to, and there's not that one person that you can call and say, 'Hey, this weird thing happened to me. Do I report it? Do I not report it?' With weird Facebook issues you call OSI [Office of Special Investigations]. I had that training going in. But with random stuff like rattling doors, I have no idea who you would even ask on 'Where should you report this to?'”*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

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**Cadet-Level Issue.** Some participants reported feeling that experiences of sexual harassment are not as severe as sexual assault and, therefore, would not warrant filing a report. Some explained that culturally, not just at the Academy, lower level sexual harassment behaviors (e.g., jokes) are not seen as egregious. Many participants explained that sexual harassment incidents, therefore, should be handled at the lowest level, the cadet level. Others supported the idea that potential harassers would stop the behavior immediately if they were told to.

*“If it’s sexual assault, I think they’re more likely to report. If it’s sexual harassment, they might say, well, ‘I’ll just let it blow over. It made me feel bad, that joke wasn’t appropriate, but I’m not going to make an issue of this because I might get more negative feedback.’ But if it’s sexual assault, ‘Okay, I feel like they crossed the line.’” – Faculty*

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Cadets and faculty members in the focus groups emphasized that students would not report sexual harassment because they would want to avoid getting cadets in trouble or to protect their own reputations. Some participants noted that they would not want to be seen as “that guy” or the “snitch” who caused a fellow cadet to get in trouble over a perceived non-issue. Others indicated the punishment for perpetrating sexual harassment is too severe and does not match the offense of “telling jokes.”

*“I’m not really surprised that there was zero formal complaints about sexual harassment, because I know with people in my squad, any time someone even says the word ‘EO,’ immediately people are like, ‘Whoa, you’re not going to go to EO, are you?’ If you talk about going to EO for something, it’s automatically you seem like the bad guy for going to report something to EO and ruining the career of the other person.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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Some female cadets and faculty members in the sessions also noted that female cadets might not report experiencing sexual harassment in order to “fit” better with their male cohort.

*“I also want to add on to that zero number of reports for sexual harassment. I know the majority of female cadets that I’ve talked to or interacted with, and me personally, I don’t want to pull the woman card. I’m different; I have different standards; I wear different clothing. I know that I’m different already.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## Prevalence of Retaliation

### Ostracism

Participants were asked whether they believe a person who reported sexual assault would experience ostracism from their peers at the Academy. Many indicated a major barrier to reporting includes the fear of being ostracized. Participants explained that following an incident, rumors will spread quickly and students would likely take sides, specifically in a “he said–she said” manner. Few said they believe that any other form of retaliation, including maltreatment or reprisal, would occur at USAFA.

*“I hear it in my classroom. ‘Hey, so and so, they’re shunned now because they reported on their brother or their sister in their squadron and now everyone is hosed.’ So they’re known as the snitch now. That’s the kind of retaliation we’re facing.” – Faculty*

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*“I think that’s the biggest reason people don’t report. You live where you work and you can’t escape it. So if you report it—there’s people in our squadrons who have done a lot less and have gotten a lot worse treatment. So I can’t even imagine reporting a sexual assault from somebody who is well-liked in your squadron, some athletes and stars, some squadron commander, and in dealing with that type of shunning, that type of problem. I think that’s the biggest reason they won’t report it.”* – **Freshman, Male**

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Because students are prone to taking sides, some participants described how the spread of rumors could evolve into potential shaming of victims or victim-blaming. If an accused student is popular or well respected, other participants posited that cadets might not believe the victim.

*“I think that would happen. If my best friend was accused of rape, I don’t think I would automatically think he’s guilty or automatically think he’s innocent, but some people might jump to conclusions and say, ‘No, she wasn’t actually raped,’ and then try to defend your brother until proven wrong. And I think the side product of that could be really just bad rumors.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

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The spread of rumors also could cause potential harm to how students feel toward the accused, with male students and faculty members in the focus groups discussing perceived a general fear of being targeted as a potential perpetrator. Some participants expressed concern about perceptions of not being presumed innocent if accused.

*“Culturally, with sexual assault and sexual harassment cases, the way the culture has been now is you’re guilty until you can vindicate yourself, at least by the handling offices, by the public.”* – **Freshman, Male**

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### **Private Social Media and Retaliation**

Few participants indicated they thought victims would be retaliated against via social media. Those participants who indicated social media could be used in retaliation suggested that Jodel or similar anonymous platforms would be used to spread information about the victim.

*“Just the possibility that it could happen is the biggest fear. For those people who are worried about retaliation, just the fact that it exists and that someone could then go on there and that person could go on Jodel and completely anonymously give all of your information, like, ‘Cadet so-and-so did this, and blah, blah, blah.’ And it probably would never happen, but there’s the possibility.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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### **Training and Prevention**

Participants were asked questions about the sexual assault prevention training they have received at the Academy, including what types of messaging they received and which training strategies were effective to disseminate information. Generally, both cadets and faculty members in the

sessions indicated that cadets receive a variety of training and prevention messaging during their tenure at USAFA.

## Effectiveness

Some participants indicated the training provided at the Academy has been effective in highlighting prevention strategies, as well as giving students important information about reporting. Many stated USAFA's training days (i.e., days in which students participate in trainings or take climate surveys) show that the Academy takes deliberate steps to emphasize the seriousness of these topics.

Many cadet and faculty participants acknowledged their confidence about knowing how to report sexual assault stems from the amount of training they have received. Some were able to describe who they are allowed to report to, as well as the different types of reports a victim can make. Participants also noted the amount of training on sexual assault has bled into the Academy's climate: cadets are more willing to make a report because they hear about how to report often.

*“Honestly, they do pretty good. They’ve run the gamut as far as ‘This is how you report it, these are different situations that this could happen in.’ They talk about the climate as a whole. It starts with the little things, not letting it get to that point. I feel like that’s good.” – Freshman, Female*

*“The fact that at the Academy they talk about it as a freshman, ‘Hey, this is what sexual assault is, this is what sexual harassment is.’ They discuss it as an open topic so that way cadets are more aware of, ‘Hey, he or she can’t say that to me, I’m not comfortable with that, I need to go tell somebody,’ and they have the resources and the avenues they can come talk to, whether it be a coach, whether it be an instructor, or whether it be one of these formal avenues.” – Faculty*

## Student Training

**Facilitator Type.** When asked about what helped make training successful, the majority of participants indicated the type of facilitator was very impactful. Most cadets and faculty members in the focus groups suggested facilitators could be outside guests, students, leadership, or SAPR personnel as long as the person delivering the information takes the subject seriously and makes it relevant to the lives of cadets. Faculty members in the groups also suggested that trainers of these topics should make the occupation their full-time mission.

Participants described how guest speakers who use humor and real-life scenarios are seen as credible and influential to students. In the sessions, cadets expressed that they would be more likely to appreciate training in which speakers (1) know how to address students as cadets, (2) are knowledgeable about the topic, (3) make an effort to relate to them as future leaders, and (4) do not shame or belittle them. Speakers who are able to reframe conversations about sexual assault prevention and response are also well received; these speakers are able to discuss topics related to sexual assault with a fresh perspective (e.g., legal perspective, real-world vignettes) that encourages students to talk about what they had seen after the training.

*“He’s not a by the book, he’s not going to throw the rules at us the entire time. It sends a message. When he made a joke, it’s something like that that he can connect with us in a real genuine way, not in a scripted way. It does change the atmosphere, the dialogue between the audience and the speaker.”*

– **Freshman, Male**

*“It’s real basic, but if they can engage the audience. If they can do that, then usually we’re pretty interested. She was talking about the same sort of things we’ve been talking about, but they were real cases, they were incidents, she could tell us about things.”* – **Upperclassman, Mixed Gender**

Cadet and faculty participants also shared their perspectives on the types of facilitators that would be ineffective. Some reported that they felt speakers who are unfamiliar with the dynamics of cadets’ lives or the Academy culture are not capable of relating messaging to them. Others said facilitators who focus too much on gender inequality, which causes men to feel targeted, would be unsuccessful. Some participants noted that regardless of the quality of the speaker, it is important for the Academy to convey what topics will be covered during training; many gave examples of how feeling surprised by sexual assault training causes them to feel disengaged or unwilling to participate.

*“Her message actually was good, but because we were not framed for it properly, it came off like guys are bad, girls are always oppressed, and we should only do this or that.”* – **Upperclassman, Mixed Gender**

*“She insulted a lot of us because she brought in a lot of outside knowledge and didn’t really observe our culture. And a lot of her facts were about the Navy and the Naval Academy. As someone in the Air Force, that insults me because no one’s culture is the same, especially across Academies, and especially across the service. If you’re not going to know who you’re talking to, maybe you shouldn’t come talk to us. That’s how I felt walking out of that briefing... and it went in one ear and went out the other ear and made people more angry than educated. So I think that when you get an outside speaker, I really appreciate when they actually take the time to get to know the culture.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

Some cadets and faculty members in the sessions indicated that lecture style training is ineffective in engaging students. Lecture training, which involves PowerPoint presentations, is not taken seriously. Situations in which thousands of cadets are trained together were also dismissed as a “waste of time,” as many participants indicated students could take the opportunity to misbehave or sleep during the presentation because there are too many people to police.

*“I think it varies. When you put a thousand or 2,000 or sometimes 4,000 people in a room, that’s just a waste of time and money. When they bring in a speaker who might be renowned and very good at what he or she does, you put a thousand people in a room together and make it mandatory at—put it at*



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*8 o'clock at night when people have a test the next day, you're just not going to see results." – Sophomore, Male*

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Some participants reported that they felt training is not taken seriously when it is pushed by leadership. Some indicated that they believe training alone will not stop sexual assault from occurring and they will need to see more effort from leadership in order to see change. Many cadets and faculty member participants suggested leadership pushes training only when incidents happen at the Academy, which often causes students to be suspicious of intentions. Cadets and faculty member participants referred to a recent scandal at the Academy as an example.

*"Recently we had to go to the cadets to inform them about a recent incident, and from what I got from the cadet reaction from that was, 'Why are you telling us now? Why did you take so long to tell us? What are you trying to hide or do?' The reason it took so long to tell them was because of the legal process. There's supposed to be confidentiality and all of that stuff. So I think sometimes there's a disconnect between what leadership says and then how things are executed that can create a perception of maybe they're not as serious as they say they are." – Faculty*

*"We had an incident recently... It started to leak, so then permanent party—or at least this is the perception I got from a bunch of cadets—called an emergency all-call by group, so a thousand of us in each room. They basically briefed us. 'Yes, this happened.' And it felt like permanent party was—not sweeping it under the rug, but CYA, cover their [expletive], just to be like, 'Yes, we briefed them about it. Yeah, good, uh-huh.' They do a lot of briefings like that just to cover themselves." – Sophomore, Male*

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Some cadets and faculty members in the focus groups indicated that during training, it is useful and meaningful for students to hear that personnel at the Academy are available to them as resources or to provide support.

*"They've told us in these meetings that we're very open, our door is always open. And at the end, they conclude with, 'Does anyone have any problems going on, anything like that?' It's not that people will answer; it's just that people know that these guys want to know. So if you have an issue, you can go to them. They are willing to talk about anything. It's not like 'I'm telling you things'; it's a conversation. That's been extraordinarily helpful in my squadron for the culture that's in my squadron right now."*  
– Upperclassman, Female

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**Perceived Relevance.** The majority of participants indicated that training would be successful and meaningful to students if it reflected situations that were applicable to their lives. Many criticized training because they felt it is geared toward the minority who are victims or perpetrators. Several participants suggested modifying training to engage cadets' attitudes about USAFA's core values as future leaders and how to handle disrespect.

*“If USAFA took that approach and talked about how this is not just about you and trying to get you not to rape someone or you to be a wingman, this is about the Air Force and how it’s your responsibility as a leader to pay attention to this issue and be prepared to take care of it in the future. But when you make it clear that the point of the SAPR brief is ‘Hey,’ you came here to be an officer in the Air Force, in however many years when you graduate, when you get to your first duty assignment, you’ve been there for three hours and Airman Snuffy comes up and says, ‘Sir, I think I was raped last night,’ you know how to handle it; you know how to talk to them; you know who you can go to, or at least where to start; and you know what to do and what not to do. I think that would help get more people to buy in. Because a lot of people start buying in when you start talking about being a leader, being in charge of people, responsibilities that you will have when you graduate.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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Many participants highlighted that their current training makes male students feel targeted or labeled as potential rapists. They considered this mislabeling to be problematic because they felt the majority of male cadets would not perpetrate an offense, and the tone may cause male cadets to miss useful messaging.

*“When we do the blame game, if there’s a group of guys, I’m not going to take this seriously because that’s accepting that I’m a bad person because I said this thing to a girl. And they’re not going to take anything else seriously if it’s a little bit blame-y. They don’t want to be blamed if they haven’t done anything.” – Sophomore, Female*

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**Training Fatigue.** The majority of participants agreed that cadets receive too much training on sexual assault prevention and response, specifically on definitions and how to report. Some indicated that they believed the amount of training causes cadets to stop absorbing information. Because cadets are so busy, participants posited they may feel their time is being wasted and could potentially respond to training with jokes or other actions that show they are not taking the topic seriously.

*“We have a lot of SARC briefings. The amount that we have of those is so high that people just disregard the topic.” – Sophomore, Female*

*“These cadets get so much that they have to do that it gets to the point where they just shut off and they go through the motions and they’re already angry and frustrated. Here again, we have another mandated training. It doesn’t matter what it’s about. And then the training is really focused on the obvious stuff, like consent, things like that, where most of them, they know it, they get it. And the messages don’t really—or the trainings don’t really impact any of the underlying or implicit factors.” – Faculty*

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Alternatively, some cadets and faculty members in the focus groups indicated that they find the amount of training to be helpful. They said they find the repetition useful for remembering prevention messaging and feel that the importance of the topic is emphasized.

*“I think that’s good, though, because it does mean we know the answers. I think we get a lot of sexual assault training, and I don’t think that it’s a bad thing.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

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Some participants acknowledged training on these topics has improved over the last few years. Some indicated training is more interactive and discussion oriented, whereas others appreciated the Academy’s attempts to make the training more relevant to their lives.

*“I think the training has shifted in the past year in a positive way. Instead of trying to change the minds of people that actually commit these acts, to change the mindset where helping people find situations where sexual assault is occurring... I think is a good thing, because I think a lot of the grumblings come from the fact that a lot of people are like, ‘I hate these people that do this stuff, and how do I stop these people?’ And I think the briefings have changed, in the sense that now we’re educating people how to identify bad situations and how to respond to bad situations, which I think that’s the way to help solve this.”* – **Upperclassman, Mixed Gender**

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### **Faculty Training**

Faculty members were asked about the sexual assault and sexual harassment training they receive as well. Most indicated their training has gotten better in many ways compared to previous years. Some faculty in the sessions reported that they feel that resources are better publicized, and some expressed confidence that they can handle and appropriately respond to the disclosure of a victim.

*“We’ve gotten more through the years, and I think now we have resources.”*  
– **Faculty**

*“It’s more publicized where to go for our resources. So should you find yourself in a situation where you need a refresher, it’s just literally a phone call away. You know who to call or where to call. And pretty much any time you can call and say, ‘Okay, here’s what’s going on. What do I need to do next?’”* – **Faculty**

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Some faculty participants indicated that they would appreciate more detailed training tailored to what they need to do following the disclosure process; for example, information about how long they need to be involved in the process if a student comes to them or how much guidance they should provide.

*“Knowing how to get them to the help, but there’s also that point of how far do you stay with them to get them through that. And that can sometimes be*

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*long and continuous. It's tough, because you can't completely back out. You've got to stay in and you've got to stay engaged."* – **Faculty**

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## Training Opportunities

Participants were asked to suggest ways in which to improve sexual assault and sexual harassment training.

### Topics

Several topics and opportunities emerged from discussion. Some of the dominant topics that were mentioned included training that involved “gray,” real-life scenarios, gender-specific situations, incidents that might occur once they graduate, and events that involve sexual harassment.

**Scenarios.** Generally, cadet and faculty participants indicated that they want to hear about real stories and their outcomes during training. Similarly, some also said they want to discuss real-life examples of successful prevention efforts. Learning about these scenarios could provide cadets with relatable examples as well as encourage them to help prevent incidents.

*“We don't hear enough success stories either of the reporting process. I don't really know how that would happen, but it would be good to hear someone, like, ‘Hey, due to this unrestricted report, this cadet was brought to justice,’ or ‘This perpetrator who did this, they're gone, they're in prison. It was a success.’ I think that would definitely motivate more people to take action.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

*“I think if you did something like first lieutenants or captains that have been in active squadrons for three or four years to confide about their experiences. Maybe they've come across sexual assault or something like that. And they're closer to our age. They can talk to us and maybe relate better.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

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**Emphasis on Bystander Intervention.** Most participants indicated that students receive bystander intervention training. Some reported that they believe bystander intervention training is important for cadets to learn, especially the threshold for when to intervene or take action. Many indicated that they feel the training is helpful, although a few indicated the training could involve more variety in the scenarios and more Academy and Service-specific examples.

*“I think the focus on training, instead of being passive, this could happen, towards an active you can stop this, this has been really helpful. And I think I've seen that through the four years.”* – **Upperclassman, Mixed Gender**

*“The one that we received recently, the bystander training that we had, how to intervene, and I very much appreciated that one... It addressed the situation that could conceivably come up, rules of engagement, what I might do in order to help a situation. And I thought that was actually useful. And*

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*the person who conducted it did it in a very open, authentic way, and it was mercifully short.” – Faculty*

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**Healthy Relationships.** Some participants indicated training on building healthy relationships would be useful to cadets. Healthy relationships were described as relationships—romantic or platonic—that do not include physical, emotional, or psychological abuse.

*“I think that we need more training early on healthy relationships. Because I think they feed it to you a little bit senior year right when you get engaged. I think you need it way earlier on: Here’s how to find somebody that’s going to build you up. You see so many toxic relationships just dating...For the training piece, I would say I think it would be very valuable to bring in some sort of healthy relationships training and focus and mentors.” –*

**Upperclassman, Female**

*“I feel like where a lot of cadets need some help in education is what does a healthy relationship look like. I’ve talked with some cadets, and they may be in a relationship, and I’m sitting here thinking, ‘Oh, my gosh, that is such an unhealthy relationship. They have no idea.’ And so I would like to see, on the other end of the spectrum, help them gain the understanding of what a healthy relationship looks like and other things that might benefit them in other areas of life, try to mix training, things like that, that have been shown to be a factor.” – Faculty*

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Some female cadets in the sessions said that they find training in which differences between the genders are discussed to be impactful, particularly for male cadets to hear about what the Academy is like for female cadets.

*“I think it would be helpful to have the guys take a walk in the girls’ shoes. In that one briefing with the lawyer, she mentioned, girls, ‘What do you do to protect yourselves at USAFA?’ Or she first asked the guys, and it was just crickets. Nobody could come up with an idea. Then she asked women in the room, ‘What do you do to protect yourself?’ Suddenly, it was a sea of things. Lock your doors at night, make sure that you always go in a group, make sure that you always have a really good DD, don’t be in the dormitory at night alone. Walking with your keys in your hand to your car, check the back seat of the car before you get in at night, all of these random things. And the guys were just astonished at how we could come up with such an extensive list on the fly. So many of those things guys didn’t even realize that cadet girls were concerned about. So I think that was very effective in helping show the guys that you don’t have to be some crazy, paranoid woman to be concerned about locking your door at night. That’s just something that you feel like you need to do in order to be safe at USAFA.”*

**– Upperclassman, Female**

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**Sexual Harassment Scenarios.** Some cadets and faculty participants indicated their training did not provide enough information about how to handle sexual harassment. Therefore, several participants mentioned that including more sexual harassment-specific scenarios in their training would help them understand how to prevent situations from escalating.

*“I think that’s actually an important thing, because we always have these SAPR briefs, and they always talk about statistics and definitions and what you should do in that situation. But it never talks about the smaller things, like day to day, how when someone makes a joke or something like that. They’ll mention that, but they’ll never say why it’s so important to call out little things like jokes that people make about that sort of thing. It’s just sort of taken for granted that, ‘Yeah, it’s important.’”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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### **Administration**

**Discussions.** Cadets and faculty members in the focus groups consistently explained that small-group discussions provide deeper and more meaningful training opportunities. Many said they have noticed an increase in small-group discussion, which they felt is a positive step for the Academy. Some participants suggested that small groups could be run by personnel not from the Academy, whereas others believe small groups could be run by trained cadets. However, both groups agreed that whoever leads the small-group discussion needs to take the subject seriously and be well-trained. Participants suggested continuing the use of small-group discussions, specifically those that employ action-oriented activities. Small groups are also viewed as being more effective because cadets have to be serious in them since more attention is paid to each individual person.

*“People all of a sudden get the courage to joke around and make fun of the situation when there are a thousand people. But when you’ve got 40 people in a room and someone is a professional and takes time out of their day to come address the situation, no one is stupid or disrespectful enough to not take that seriously.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

*“Stuff like this, if it was small groups run by SAPR. The open dialogue we’re having, especially because of the anonymity and the low-time requirement for the other things we have to do, it does foster more of a want to engage.”*  
– **Freshman, Male**

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**Scheduling.** Cadets and faculty members shared their thoughts about when to have training and how often. Generally, participants reported that they felt there was no right time to hold training because cadets’ schedules are full, and therefore, they can become bitter toward training if it is not meaningful.

*“Most of the time these briefings are at night, on a weeknight. So, in order for us not to complain about it, you need to give us a reason to actually be there. Because there’s so much other stuff that we have to be doing.”*  
– **Sophomore, Female**

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## Prevention Discussions

Some participants indicated that having more women at the Academy has improved relationships among students. USAFA also has a gender forum that allows cadets and faculty to discuss topics related to gender openly. Some indicated they believe the gender forum is a useful tool to connect to all cadets. Other participants noted that USAFA has made an effort to put more women in leadership positions, which has helped shift the culture.

*“We have what used to be called women’s forum. It’s now called gender forum. When it was women’s forum, we would take all of the women at the Academy, break them up per year, and they would meet once a year for about two hours, have a luncheon and discuss topics relevant to women at the Academy as well as serving in the military. The Academy has since expanded that to gender forums because one of the major feedback that was given from the cadets was the men need to be involved in these conversations as well. So the conversation has been expanded to all 4,000 cadets.” – Faculty*

Although some reported they believed the gender forum and other similar discussion-based events have been helpful, many other cadets in the sessions said they do not want to discuss the role of gender in the military, as they do not see a need to discuss it.

*“I think I tend to avoid it, the role of a woman in the military. I don’t want to talk about that. I want to be in the role of a person in the military, I guess. I don’t like that distinction, so I don’t want to make it.” – Sophomore, Female*

Participants were asked whether they feel the Academy solicited and incorporated feedback from cadets. Some agreed it is a good idea to get feedback from the cadets about how to conduct training. However, few participants reported believing that the feedback would be integrated. Some noted that prevention strategies might be found by asking cadets to share their ideas about improvements to training.

*“I’ve seen some good things. They have various clubs, and this generation is attuned to this. They understand it’s an issue. We’re seeing this across campuses nationwide, that this stuff has been hiding out in the dark for a lot of years and we’re trying to bring it into the light. It’s pulling good ideas from them, making sure they’re included in the conversation.” – Faculty*

*“I don’t think they seek input from cadets. From what I’ve heard and what I know, [sexual assault] used to be a much bigger problem at the Academy. So when the new Superintendent came in, she made it her top, number one, this is what I’m going to crack down on, and that’s been her legacy, I would say, is implementing all these different SAPR programs... So I feel like SAPR is kind of this permanent party. We have to make sure that the cadets don’t do this, versus a dialogue about in the military, we should try and prevent sexual assault. I think at the Academy, that’s not something permanent party tends to work with cadets on.” – Freshman, Male*





## Chapter 5: Discussion

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The findings from the *2017 SAGR* that are presented in this report are the result of the Office of People Analytics' effort to assess the current climate around sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other gender-related issues at the Military Service Academies (MSAs) in 2017 through focus groups. This chapter summarizes findings and key themes voiced by focus group participants across the Academies while identifying gaps illustrated by the research.

### Summary of Findings

Participants at each of the three MSAs discussed a wide range of topics about gender relations at their Academy, from broad topics such as general culture on campus to specific ways to improve training and foster the prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

When looking at the Academies from a wide view, participants focused the discussion on leadership, socializing, alcohol, peer communication, and women at the Academy. Although student participants across the Academies included many members of their community in their definitions of leadership, the biggest influencers on day-to-day life and mindset were those that the cadets and midshipmen participants were most exposed to: immediate command, the cadet/midshipmen leadership, seniors, and other peers. That influence of proximity did not end at leadership; student participants also noted socialization occurred with those they saw frequently: members of their company or squadron, classes, or athletic teams. Alcohol use was viewed as playing a major part in socialization at the Academies, particularly off campus and with upperclassmen.

Participants repeatedly called attention to the fact that their Academies were small, tight-knit communities in which news travels fast. The quick spread of information led many student participants to note a lack of privacy at the MSAs. Cadet and midshipman participants indicated they felt that they were under a microscope and needed to portray a professional public image, including on social media. Participants said students used private platforms for comments and content not deemed appropriate for one's public image, including less publicly acceptable opinions about women at the Academy. Participants from all MSAs indicated the most prominent conversations about women at the Academy have cropped up when policy changes occur or when discussing the physical standards set for roles in their Service.

When focusing the conversation on perceptions about sexual assault and sexual harassment at the MSAs, both students and faculty who participated in the focus groups reported they felt that cadets and midshipmen understood the definition of sexual assault but were less confident in identifying sexual harassment. Across all Academies, participants agreed that freshman were isolated from much of the Academy student body and current policy helped keep the reported incidence of unwanted sexual contact (USC) low. It was unsurprising to participants that once cadets and midshipmen were no longer sequestered and became sophomores, the reported incidence of USC climbed. Cadets and midshipmen participants indicated they felt confident in how to handle and intervene if they witnessed a "black and white" situation involving sexual

assault but were less comfortable in the “gray area.” When asked about other factors affecting sexual assault and sexual harassment, alcohol use was discussed at length. Another factor covered by participants was the tight-knit community, which made cadets or midshipmen not want to get each other in trouble.

Participants identified a number of barriers to reporting, including fear of damaging one’s reputation both at the Academy and later once he or she becomes an officer, concerns with getting in trouble for collateral misconduct, and the lack of privacy and strenuous nature of the process. Participants also feared retaliation in the form of ostracism. Additionally, students and faculty discussed an Academy culture that fostered an environment of non-reporting, in which cadets and midshipmen would not tend to turn each other in for any misconduct, gender related or not.

Discussions on training and prevention detailed what worked and did not work at the MSAs and opportunities for improvement. Participants noted the trainings have effectively laid out definitions and explained the process for reporting but said they often felt repetitive. Cadet and midshipman participants indicated they felt that while most students would not act as a perpetrator, many could be in a position to prevent a sexual assault or sexual harassment. Gearing training to prevention may help them know what to do if that time comes.

## Key Themes Voiced by Participants of Focus Groups

Looking across Academies, some overarching themes and opportunities identified by participants come to the surface. These themes are: influencers at the Academy, the importance of reputation, gaps in sexual harassment understanding, thoughts on bystander interaction, presence of alcohol, and training successes and opportunities.

### Academy Influencers

Student participants believed students are heavily influenced by their peers in addition to individuals in formal leadership roles. For sexual assault and sexual harassment messaging to be taken seriously at the MSAs, participants indicated student leaders and groups, such as Cadets Against Sexual Harassment and Assault (CASHA), Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education (SHAPE), and Personal Ethics and Education Representative (PEERS) as well as non-gender-related groups, need to play an active role in setting the tone on campus. Participants perceived that when respected cadets and midshipmen took a clear stance on prevention, other students would model their behavior – the senior students greatly influence the student body and can set the tone on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The perceived role of student groups in preventing and addressing sexual assault and sexual harassment was met by participants with mixed reactions. Many participants indicated they liked the access to student advocates but often thought they need more training.

*“I think that the officers can make the decisions and tell us what we’re going to do, but the cadets’ attitude is a huge factor in how it actually plays out.”*  
– Upperclassman, Female, USAFA

## Reputation

Cadet and midshipman participants indicated they were deeply concerned about their reputation, with the belief that the reputation they create at their Academy would not only stick with them for the four years they were a cadet or midshipman but would follow them into their Service once they become an officer. These concerns manifested themselves in how cadets communicated and interacted with their peers and as a barrier to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*“We’re a little bit different than a normal college in the fact that once we graduate, we’re still going to be seeing each other for the rest of our careers. And so reputation doesn’t just last for while you’re at college, it doesn’t end when you graduate. It keeps following you wherever you go.”*

*– Upperclassman, Male, USMA*

Student participants were aware of the microscope that both their Academy and they are under. They self-policed each other’s public social media profiles and posted unpopular opinions on private or anonymous platforms. Due to the small size of the Academies and the tight-knit community, participants noted word travels fast, making student’s acutely aware of the lack of privacy.

Cadet and midshipman participants expressed fear in reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment because of the perceived lack of privacy and for the subsequent reputation they will receive as both someone who reports and as a victim. Although participants were aware of the different reporting options (restricted and unrestricted), there was a lack of trust that a restricted report would stay private. Participants believed the culture of not reporting fellow cadets or midshipmen for misconduct of any kind leads to those who report being labeled as “untrustworthy” or a “snitch.”

*“A label like that [a reporter of sexual assault] goes with your name, after that happens it carries on well past the Naval Academy”*

*– Upperclassman, Female, USNA*

Additionally, if the alleged perpetrator has a reputation as a “good” cadet/midshipman, participants perceived that there may be additional implications for the reporter, such as retaliation in the form of ostracism. For male victims, the focus groups suggested the risk to their reputation and perceived lack of privacy may be one of the larger barriers to reporting an incident of sexual assault or sexual harassment.

Students in the focus groups indicated potential career implications from a reputation earned at the Academy might also keep cadet and midshipman from reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Student participants acknowledged that they will continue to work with their classmates as officers in their Service.

## Sexual Harassment

According to participants, official reports of sexual harassment were not necessarily reflective of the number of incidents at the MSAs. There were several barriers to

*“...if someone is a jerk in a non-sexual way to someone, I wouldn’t bring that up to the chain of command, I’d try to handle it. And I’d do the same thing with sexual harassment.”*

*– Upperclassman, Female, USNA*

reporting sexual harassment that were discussed. Participants were not always clear on the definition of sexual harassment and were less likely to be able to identify it when it occurred. Cadets and midshipmen in the focus groups felt confident they knew how to report sexual assault but shared confusion and uncertainty about how to report sexual harassment. Finally, sexual harassment was seen as an issue that should be handled at the peer-to-peer level. Cadet and midshipman participants believed that as future officers and members of a leadership training academy, they should, when possible, handle issues at the lowest level and manage the issues themselves.

Although the participants suggested cadets and midshipmen were unlikely to report sexual harassment, some voiced concerns recognizing a link between letting sexual harassment go and the possibility of more serious harm in the future.

### **Bystander Intervention**

Although students and faculty in the focus groups felt that in a clear situation of sexual assault a cadet or midshipman would step in, there were many reasons a student might find it difficult to intervene. First, many participants noted that they would not be able to identify a high-risk situation. Some indicated they felt they would have difficulty intervening if the people involved were of higher rank. Additionally, they noted a cadet or midshipman's familiarity with the potential perpetrator or victim may influence a person's willingness to intervene.

*"I think it's difficult when friends are involved, because sometimes you don't know. Maybe my friends want to be together, or maybe they don't. It's just difficult to tell in a situation like that."  
– Sophomore, Female, USAFA*

### **Alcohol**

Both students and faculty in the sessions linked alcohol use to sexual assault and, to a lesser extent, sexual harassment. They viewed alcohol as a factor affecting both the risk of sexual assault and a barrier to reporting sexual assault. Participants thought that members of the Academy community often discussed sexual assault and alcohol hand in hand, having trouble disconnecting the two in their discussion, even when explicitly asked to think of factors other than alcohol. Alcohol was also discussed as contributing to confusion about consent, leading many cadets and midshipmen to believe false reporting may occur.

*"Not every time you drink there's going to be a sexual assault, and not every sexual assault is the result of alcohol, but I think that there's never a good relationship between the two."  
– Upperclassman, Male, USAFA*

Cadets and midshipmen in the focus groups feared collateral misconduct for alcohol use during a sexual assault, as either victim or bystander. Some cadet and midshipman participants also indicated that they believed that alcohol could act as a barrier to reporting when a victim blames themselves for an incident of sexual assault.

## Training and Prevention Opportunities

Cadets and midshipmen focus group participants saw many opportunities to improve training and prevention efforts. They voiced a desire to hear about real situations that related both to their life at their Academy but also to circumstances they might encounter as officers in their Service. Student participants also wanted to see examples of multiple types of victims and perpetrators in their trainings. Female cadets/midshipmen in the focus groups did not want to only be portrayed as victims, whereas male cadets/midshipmen in the focus groups did not want to only be portrayed as perpetrators.

*“I just want to really repeat it, we need to talk about men on women, but we also need to bring into the discussion more so women on men, men on men, and woman on woman, because it is a problem. Not as much as the men on women, but it is a problem, we need to talk about it. Because these things happen.”*

– Upperclassman, Male, USMA

Cadets and midshipmen in the sessions reported they would like to receive their trainings and prevention messaging from officers and alumni. Being able to relate to the presenter was viewed as a powerful tool. Student participants also indicated a desire to hear from survivors of sexual assault.

Many cadets and midshipmen in the focus groups indicated that they believed although they would most likely not be a victim or a perpetrator of sexual assault or sexual harassment, they would be more likely to be in a position as a bystander. Therefore, across the MSAs students in the focus group would like more training on how to identify signs and prevent the occurrence of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Students in the sessions indicated they would like hands-on trainings and examples of scenarios outside of what they have been exposed to in their current curriculum. Cadet and midshipman participants wanted to understand their role in prevention.

## Areas for Future Research

The *Service Academy Gender Relations* research is an ongoing assessment of the MSAs with either a survey or focus groups conducted each academic year. Findings from the previous 2017 SAGR indicate areas for future research.

1. **Barriers to Intervention:** Cadets and midshipmen in the focus groups indicated they believed they would intervene in a situation in which sexual assault or sexual harassment is about to occur. However, many students also stated there were a number of situations in which their role would be unclear. Although this research started to explore these barriers, a more in depth look at barriers to intervening in both sexual assault and sexual harassment would help tailor future trainings about bystander intervention.
2. **Continuum of Harm:** Cadet and midshipman participants struggled with how to define, identify, and report sexual harassment. Continuing to explore students’ understanding and knowledge gaps about issues of sexual harassment can offer insights into the full continuum of harm. The construct of continuum of harm is a

- conclusion drawn from research showing that tolerance for sexual harassment and related behaviors is likely to create a permissive climate for sexual assault.<sup>14</sup>
3. **Male Victims:** Students and faculty in the focus groups stated that many male victims did not feel comfortable coming forward and reporting an incident of sexual assault or sexual harassment. Additional research on this population can help the DoD better understand their needs and offer services to match.
  4. **Hazing and Bullying:** Research shows male victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment often did not view their incident as USC but instead identified their experience as hazing and/or bullying. Gaining a better understanding of the mindset around hazing and bullying may offer new messaging strategies to policy offices.
  5. **Sharing of Explicit Images without Consent:** Due to issues in recent years surrounding the sharing of explicit images without the subject's consent, exploring the topic in the *SAGR* research will help understand the role that image sharing may play at the Academies.
  6. **Student Groups:** Cadets and midshipmen participants indicated they are influenced by their peers. Focusing research on the peer-led groups that deal with gender relations at the Academy— CASHA, SHAPE, and PEERs—may offer new insights in promoting student advocacy around prevention.

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<sup>14</sup> Turchik, J. A., & Wilson, S. M. (2010). Sexual assault in the US military: A review of the literature and recommendations for the future. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 15*(4), 267–277.

**Appendix A.**  
**U.S. Coast Guard Academy Results**





## Appendix 1: U.S. Coast Guard Academy

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A total of nine<sup>15</sup> 90-minute focus groups were conducted at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) from March 13 through March 17, 2017. Of the nine groups, seven groups were with cadets and three were with faculty. Thirty-eight cadets and 19 faculty/staff members participated. For the purposes of this report beliefs and opinions attributed to “student,” “faculty,” or “cadet,” refer to participants in the 2017 SAGR focus groups.

### General Culture

USCGA is located in New London, CT, a small coastal town, about two and a half hours from both New York City and Boston, that cadets perceive as fairly removed from city life or outside influence.

USCGA (“the Academy”) is the smallest of the five federal Service Academies, and this distinction brings with it a sense of a close-knit community. Cadets value this closeness and are proud of the unique culture at the Academy—they perceive that USCGA, more than any other Service Academy, sets a high standard for conduct, leadership, academic excellence, and personal responsibility for fellow cadets. Cadets view USCGA’s culture to be highly distinct from civilian schools; the demanding and regimented atmosphere, along with the strict rules for conduct make the Academy feel insulated and safe, but also a world apart. The culture, while protective and promoting of excellence, can also feel restrictive.

### Academy Environment

Faculty and cadets were asked general questions about the environment at the Academy, including what distinguishes it from other Service Academies in general and specifically related to gender relations.

A recurring theme that arose when discussing the Academy is the familial atmosphere, which is fostered by both Academy leadership and fellow cadets. The Academy culture and policies help cadets hold each other accountable and feel responsible for one another. Cadets internalize the idea that they maintain a high standard of ethical conduct, and they feel this quality sets them apart from the other Service Academies.

*“Our service mentality [exemplifies] a people helping service, which I think helps us because that really is what we’re leaning towards, trying to get people to understand that we’re here to help each other as well as to help the general public. When you go to other Service Academies, it’s not necessarily the same case.” – Faculty, Male*

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<sup>15</sup> Ten focus groups were scheduled at USCGA. Due to a blizzard OPA was unable to conduct a group with athletic faculty.

*“I think the school does a really good job of saying hold your teammates accountable, this is your family; you have to take care of everybody.”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

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The focus on shared responsibility also encourages a feeling of trust; in general, cadets feel safe on campus and that they can depend on one another.

*“Our barracks are a safe place. If you go talk to the majority of the cadets, they’ll probably say they never lock their door and I think that’s the way it’s viewed throughout...they leave valuables out, even though they’re not supposed to, never lock that door because they have that sense of this is a safe place.”* – **Faculty, Male**

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## Leadership

Participants were asked who they perceive as leaders and influencers on campus. Cadets and staff agreed leadership at USCGA takes many forms, primarily falling into four groups: cadet leadership, staff leadership, military leadership, and Academy leadership. Cadets identified peers of the class above them or higher as cadet leaders; civilian faculty/staff are considered staff leaders; Coast Guard Commanding Officers, Company Officers and Chiefs, and military cadre staff are considered military leaders; and the Academy Commandant and Superintendent are the key Academy leaders.

The Corps of Cadets at the Academy is run by the cadets themselves, with each class except the freshman serving some type of leadership role. Seniors (“Firsties”) serve as the key Corps leaders, fulfilling the roles of Regimental Staff Officers, Company Commanders, Department Heads, and Division Officers. Juniors serve as Assistant Division Chiefs, mentoring and supervising freshman and sophomore cadets. Sophomore cadets help to model behavior and provide oversight of freshman cadets.

Although cadets identified a number of people who fulfill the role of leader, most cadets indicated their peers have the most influence on day-to-day behavior, attitudes, and culture.

*“I think it really boils down to the cadet level. There are oversights from officers but I wouldn’t call it leadership per se...the leading aspect comes from the upper-class cadets.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

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Cadets understand USCGA policies come from military and Academy leadership but asserted their peers have a large amount of influence, because they feel they can trust and relate to them and they are the ones with whom they spend the most time.

*“As a fourth class I can trust my third class, second class, first class. I can confide in them. I’m not as intimidated by them as I would be by an officer.”*

– **Freshman, Male**

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*“Officers are higher up than you in the ranks, so maybe they won’t understand everything you are going through or it’s been a long time since they were cadets, so they may not have the same mindset, but you can have other cadets you can talk to them and they understand what you are going through.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

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## Leadership Communication

Coast Guard and Academy leadership communicate with faculty and cadets through various means—speeches, trainings, direct conversations, e-mail, and the Academy’s internal Facebook pages. For example, the Admiral of the Coast Guard and Academy Commandant send regular e-mails through the “.mil” e-mail address. Both faculty and cadets reported government e-mail is not an effective means of communication; their “.edu” e-mail is most readily accessible on campus and what they use for day-to-day communication. Students and faculty check their “.mil” e-mail infrequently; when they have an opportunity to check it, they will have hundreds of e-mails, which they typically delete due to time constraints.

*“The first time I went to my ‘gov’ mail...I had a thousand e-mails on my ‘gov’ mail, and that was a year ago.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

*“Most people check their ‘.mil’ once every 45 days, so they don’t get locked out. That’s the issue, that all of us are in ‘edu.’”* – **Faculty, Female**

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Although staff and students understand that ongoing cases may not be reported, they want to know about the final outcomes of cases and about survey results, so they can be used to foster discussions, to prevent future occurrences, and to help destigmatize the topics of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*“I think we, as a command, hide behind ‘We’re protecting those involved,’ when some information could be shared for the betterment of the Academy.”* – **Faculty, Female**

*“[Sexual assault and sexual harassment survey results] need to be publicized to the faculty. We need to be briefed on them and have a discussion on, you know, probably smaller groups inside our buildings on how we’re going to work to change that perception.”* – **Faculty, Male**

*“I think they need to talk to it sooner after the case closes.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

*“I’ve heard about [cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment] from other channels, but I have not heard about any of this through my leadership channels.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

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## **Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy**

Cadets and staff reported that the Academy emphasizes zero tolerance of sexual assault and sexual harassment and enacts policies for the prevention of both. There was consensus that attitudes and behavior from leadership are consistent with this message.

*“I think it’s a very important issue at our school and all military institutions today...I think they talk about it a lot, more than I ever have in my life since being here...I think we all take it pretty seriously. And I think the institution in general and the Academy is very vocal about that stance on how we feel being in the military, we should have a higher standard.” – Freshman, Male*

## **Social Aspects of Academy Life**

Cadets and faculty members were asked about key aspects of cadet social life at the Academy, including the role of alcohol, cadet relationships, and modes of communication among cadets.

### **Alcohol**

Both faculty and students had a good deal to say about alcohol in terms of policy, training, use, and its relationship to sexual assault and sexual harassment. This section covers discussion of general policy and use—students and faculty were asked specifically about the Academy’s regulations on alcohol use and what role alcohol plays among cadets at the Academy. Later sections of this appendix cover the topic of alcohol as it relates to sexual assault and sexual harassment.

**Alcohol Policies.** Alcohol use is severely restricted on the Academy campus—cadets are allowed to drink only if they are sophomores or above and age 21 or older. No alcohol is allowed on campus except at Academy-sponsored events at which faculty is present. At these events, there is bar and cadets are normally allowed up to two drinks per person. Alcohol consumption by cadets is, therefore, limited to off campus for the most part. Cadets receive two mandatory trainings each year regarding USCGA alcohol policy and responsible drinking, and sexual assault training additionally addresses alcohol and its relationship to consent. Cadets can be disciplined for various alcohol-related offenses, including underage drinking/drinking as a freshman cadet, possessing alcohol on campus, and excessive drinking while off campus (particularly in relation to another punishable offense). Punishments for improper alcohol usage depend on the seriousness of the offense and range from unfavorable rating by superiors and a callout in the internal Academy website, “Parade Field Rejects,” or the monthly newsletter, “Good Order,” to getting “Masted” (formal hearing before Academy leadership) or to being expelled from the Academy.

**Alcohol Use.** Feedback from faculty and cadets provided the consistent message that alcohol use among cadets at the Academy is frequent, prevalent, and often excessive, although in general, underclassmen fear reprisal and are less likely to drink than upperclassmen. Cadets feel overly restricted in their day-to-day life at the Academy and use alcohol as an escape and a way to exert control:

*“Not being trusted for five days about it makes people just want to do whatever they can to say, ‘I’ll show you by doing exactly what you told me not to do.’” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“Part of the reason it’s worse is because we are very restrictive. I don’t think we’re teaching good behavior with alcohol and there is a lot of binge drinking. It’s a bad situation.” – Faculty, Female*

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**Weekends.** Faculty and cadets reported the policy prohibiting possession of alcohol on the Academy campus encourages cadets to wait until the weekends to consume alcohol, since they are typically only allowed to leave campus on Friday and Saturday nights. They argued this pattern can lead to a culture of binge drinking because cadets want to let loose and feel they have only a limited time to do so.

*“I think when [cadets are] limited in their ability to go out because of liberty and they’re restricted in how many times they can leave base, then they get into that port call mentality...we have to get it all in in this short amount of time and have as much fun as possible...and then then [the drinking] is going to be more focused and intense.” – Faculty, Female*

*“There’s a huge binge drinking problem, [particularly] on the weekends.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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**On versus Off Campus.** According to cadets and faculty, most drinking occurs off campus because cadets are unlikely to risk punishment for bringing alcohol on campus, and being off campus allows a sense of freedom without monitoring. As a male upperclassman stated, “It’s considered a dry campus...as a result people love to drink when they go off campus.”

Off-campus drinking frequently occurs in local bars and at parties. Cadets and faculty reported drinking commonly occurs in excess to the point where cadets come home drunk, and binge drinking is a problem.

*“You do have people coming back stinky drunk...I think there’s binge drinking.” – Faculty, Female*

*“I don’t think there’s really...a concept of moderation and self-control, it’s just do as much as you can, as quickly as you can, and then try not to get caught.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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## **Relationships**

Faculty and cadets were asked about the Academy’s policies around relationships between cadets and how these relationships (both romantic and nonromantic) are in practice.

Relationships among cadets at the Academy are important; cadets reported they are encouraged to develop friendships and they feel very close to one another.

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*“I think [friendships are] encouraged just because we’re such a small school, everyone knows each other...you generally care about the people that you are going to school with.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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**Relationship Policies.** There are strict policies in place at the Academy regarding what is acceptable for relationships and one-on-one time between cadets. The fraternization policy prohibits cadets (other than roommates) from being alone behind closed doors and from engaging in any sexual activity on campus. Another rule dictates which classes of cadets can be in relationships together. Freshman can only date fellow freshman; sophomores can date other sophomores and juniors; juniors can date other juniors, sophomores, and seniors; and seniors can date other seniors, juniors, and officers.

**Nonromantic Relationships.** The Academy’s small size, co-ed living quarters, and the amount of time spent in class, completing training, and participating in sports contribute to close friendships, both within and across genders. Cadets reported that their first friendships at the Academy form with roommates and members of the same company—each company feels like a family within itself—and as time goes on they become friends with a broader group. Regarding cross-gender friendships, students spoke of each other as family.

*“I feel like it’s kind of familial...unless you are dating the person, it’s more like that’s my sister.” – Sophomore, Male*

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Multiple students and staff stated male/female friendships are the norm and cadets feel a responsibility for one another.

*“I don’t know what it’s like at another college, but we rely very heavily on each other here on our campus.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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There are numerous intramural/extramural teams, clubs, and student organizations on campus that are another source of close bonds among cadets.

*“[Friendships are] also very separated into sports and teams and clubs and things like that...I think because those are the people you spend the most time with.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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**Romantic Relationships.** According to faculty and students, romantic relationships among cadets are common; however, cadets feel they must exercise caution due to restrictions on romantic/sexual relationships and the persistent negative perceptions about these relationships at the Academy.

*“Although it’s something that’s common...there’s still a little bit of negative stigma for some people when they see interfamily dating.” – Faculty, Female*

*“I think there’s a quote that we all know here, ‘Girls in blue are not for you,’ because...it’s kind of like we’re the family...you don’t date your sister...we’re*

*all doing this dirty work together. So, right from the beginning you...absorb that.” – Sophomore, Male*

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Both mixed gender and same-sex romantic relationships are allowed as long as they stay within the rules. Yet, these rules and the lack of privacy while on campus make it challenging to maintain a relationship.

*“I think it’s hard to be in a relationship here because there [are] so many rules on what you can and can’t do.” – Sophomore, Female*

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Cadets reported it is often the perception of the relationship and not the relationship itself that matters. Cadets are taught by Academy leadership they must maintain a professional demeanor at all times; romantic relationships can impede a cadet’s ability to be perceived as professional and unbiased.

*“There’s a rule in the regs you can carry on the relationships during leave and liberty periods but during the week you’re supposed to be entirely professional, which...mean[s] you don’t walk down the hallway holding hands.” – Freshman, Female*

*“As a cadet you can’t favor someone else just because you are in a relationship with them, you have to treat everyone equally regardless of personal relationships.” – Freshman, Male*

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A number of staff and students suggested the rules around romantic relationships are unnecessarily prohibitive and unrealistic. They proposed loosening the rules while also incorporating training and conversations on communication and healthy relationships into the messaging from Academy leadership, staff, and upper-class cadets.

*“[These rules] set up an impossible standard that people always break...when you are integrating women and there [are] going to be relationships, [Leadership] has to figure something out because there’s not going to be abstinence.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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### **Communication Among Cadets**

Faculty and cadets were asked how communication occurs among cadets at the Academy. They reported a number of modes of communication that fall into two key categories: word of mouth and social media.

**Word of Mouth.** Because the Academy is so small, word of mouth—either in person or via text or e-mail—is a common means of communication on campus. Many cadets reported word of mouth communication is used more frequently than social media because it is more private and readily accessible.

*“[Social media] is not the primary means of communication around here. The primary means would be e-mail. We do have our class Facebook pages that we use but if I’m contacting people here I’m not going to use social media for it.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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Cadets stated even if they do not know another cadet personally, they have a friend who knows him or her, which fosters a feeling of closeness but also results in the quick transmittal of information, particularly rumors about fellow cadets and alleged misbehavior.

**Social Media.** Faculty and cadets said social media is a key means of communication among cadets at the Academy, but there are situational differences in how it is used. Cadets have their public social media image at the Academy and a more private social media image that they use with friends inside and outside the Academy.

There are restrictions around social media use. Freshmen are not allowed to have any social media accounts. Other classes can use social media but their use is monitored and can be used against them if they engage in misconduct. Cadets reported that they feel they must be very careful about what the post on social media.

*“Everything you do is under a microscope, so you have to be smarter about what you are posting.” – Sophomore, Female*

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Cadets are taught the image they put out on social media reflects on them, the Academy, the Coast Guard, and their fellow cadets, and that the information they put up on social media is public and permanent. Faculty members confirmed Academy leadership emphasizes responsible social media use.

*“We talk about [cadets’] professional reputations...and how social media can be that digital tattoo that doesn’t go away. So if you are doing something not professional...it will essentially be there forever.”*  
– Faculty, Male

*“We train the upper class to help [freshmen]...once [social media access] is given back to them to make sure they understand what they should and shouldn’t be doing.” – Faculty, Male*

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**Public Use.** Cadets primarily use Facebook for internal Academy communication and as a means of putting out a carefully curated public image, since there is so much emphasis at the Academy on social media content being professional. There are Academy group Facebook pages that cadets use to communicate among themselves. According to a male faculty member, “Each class has their own Facebook group and they’ll just share massive amounts of information with each other and collaborate through that one site.”

Cadets are discouraged from posting private information to Facebook.



*“Every semester we can get a training on how not to post private incidents on Facebook.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“We use Facebook a lot for communicating within our grade and Instagram is more personal.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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**Public Use.** For personal communication among peers and with those outside the Academy, cadets are more likely to use social media applications, including Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tinder. There is a sense among cadets that their private profiles allow them to be less restricted in their behavior.

*“Talking to a lot of the upperclassmen, they spend a lot of time on social media and...they tell about their friends being stupid online.”*  
– Freshman, Female

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Yet, cadets are taught to hold each other accountable and to report any behavior that violates the rules of conduct or the standard set by the Academy.

*“If you see something that goes down and you don’t report it, you’re in trouble.” – Freshman, Female*

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## Women at the Academy

Cadets and faculty at the Academy reported the focus on recruiting female cadets and increasing the number of women in leadership roles at USCGA and in the Coast Guard at large has resulted in a greater perceived equitable treatment of males and females at the Academy.

*“It’s kind of become normal that there [are] so many women at the Coast Guard Academy and in the Coast Guard, especially compared to the other Service Academies. So I think gender relation issues aren’t as big of an issue.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“In my division there’s always females and males. Even the leadership, the upper level, your regimental staff, your highest cadet leadership, there’s always males and females equally represented, it’s not exclusive.”*  
– Freshman, Male

*“During the summer you will see that everyone, including both genders, are doing the same exact exercises...So that kind of thing kind of forms like a bond that, ‘Okay, we’re all here together regardless of gender.’”*  
– Freshman, Male

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However, there are still some reported challenges and opportunities for improvement regarding gender relations. A female staff member said she has conversations with her students about “how we can retain more and how we can keep high-performing cadets as high-performing officers later...[the cadets] do notice there are less women at the higher leadership.” Likewise, a

female upperclassman said, “Sometimes [there are discussions] about whether women should be in certain roles or are capable.” Other female upperclassmen agreed and stated that although not common, they have heard fellow male cadets express the view that “women are [at the Academy] for diversity reasons or...[that] someone got a position because she’s a woman.” A male staff member reiterated there have been times when he has had to provide conflict resolution because “male cadets have voiced strong [negative] opinions about female leadership and even to the extent [of]...I don’t believe there’s a place in the service.” Likewise, female cadets said they sometimes don’t feel comfortable participating in discussions or voicing a dissenting opinion when there’s a classroom of men and they are one of the only women.

*“When we’re having class discussions [and] the majority of the classes are guys...[if] I don’t agree with what’s being said...I’m not sure how to address it and not seem either way too emotional or, you know, like some ultra-feminist.” – Freshman, Female*

## Perceptions of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

USCGA faculty and cadets discussed their perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy. Specifically, they were asked about their understanding of both terms, their general perceptions, relevance at the Academy, and related topics such as the role of bystander intervention, alcohol, and other factors impacting sexual assault and sexual harassment.

### Definitions

Academy cadets were asked about their general knowledge about sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact (USC; which is used on Academy surveys), and sexual harassment. They were then asked to define the terms in their own words. Although cadets seemed to grasp the broad meanings of these terms, they had difficulty putting them into words and, overall, seemed to have a clearer understanding of sexual assault compared to sexual harassment.

### Sexual Assault/Unwanted Sexual Contact

Cadets reported that they understand the meaning of the terms sexual assault and USC because they had received multiple trainings focusing on them. However, when they were asked to provide clear definitions or describe situations that illustrated sexual assault or USC, cadets couldn’t agree. Most cadets said the two are the same; a male freshman stated, “Any unwanted touch is assault.” Others thought sexual assault referred to more severe or a specific set of cases, whereas USC is a broader term that could include sexual harassment. Another male freshman said, “[unwanted sexual contact] falls under harassment...I think the definition of sexual assault is a little more specific.”

### Sexual Harassment

Cadets universally expressed that while they are given examples of sexual harassment and they think they “know it when they see it,” they remain unclear on the definition of sexual harassment and feel it is a term with inherent gray area and fuzziness in terms of its interpretation.

*“I think there [are] a lot of examples given, [different] possible scenarios. But as far as a set in stone definition, not so much...it takes many different forms. It’s kind of hard to define when somebody is being sexually harassed.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

*“It’s hard to define what sexual harassment is because so many people can interpret something differently and feel differently about the same thing.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

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Some indicated that they think sexual harassment could include unwanted touching. For example, a male sophomore said it “can also include...a touch on the shoulder that you don’t want;” whereas others argued it only includes verbal scenarios. A male freshman stated, “It’s not physical, I think of it as more verbal.” Another male freshman agreed that the distinction between sexual assault and sexual harassment involves “touching versus no touching.”

Still others said the application of the term is solely dependent on how a behavior is perceived by a potential victim.

*“I feel like [harassment] is up for interpretation...Like if you say something to someone else that makes them feel uncomfortable, they might consider that sexual harassment but you...don’t.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

*“It’s all relative to the person who is being harassed...depending on what they think harassment is.”* – **Freshman, Male**

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### **General Perceptions**

Cadets and faculty were asked about their general perceptions of sexual assault and sexual harassment as they relate to life on campus.

Many cadets indicated that they perceive that the Academy upholds higher moral standards than other MSAs and civilian universities, resulting in sexual assault and sexual harassment being less of a problem at the Academy versus other educational institutions.

*“My general outlook is that...[sexual assault and sexual harassment] just isn’t something that goes on here...maybe as a fourth class [I] haven’t been exposed enough yet but...it seems like they try to make sure that it’s not something that’s going to become an issue.”* – **Freshman, Male**

*“We’re such a small group of people it is rare for us to have incidents like that...it’s not at other Academies, where that’s something that...happens often.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

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Cadets maintained there is a feeling of trust and of having each other’s backs that is built into the culture and familial bond instilled at the Academy; the result is a perception of protection and safety.

*“Especially here [on campus], I feel like it’s very, very low probability that [sexual assault] is going to happen. We all trust each other.”*

– **Sophomore, Female**

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Cadets said sexual assault and sexual harassment are seen as occurring more frequently with females. According to several male and female faculty members, cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment do occur with male victims. However, lower rates of reporting among males may contribute to a perception of lower incidence.

Many faculty and cadets reported there have been noticeable positive shifts in how sexual assault and sexual harassment are messaged and perceived, from USCG and Academy leadership down to students.

*“The conversation used to be targeted towards women as you’ll probably be a victim at some point. I think it’s gotten better as including men in the discussion...it’s everybody’s problem.”* – **Faculty, Female**

*“What I’ve seen is that they’re trying to get more cadet involvement...the CASA [Cadets Against Sexual Assault] club has grown significantly since I’ve been here and they’ve really tried to make the training more cadet driven.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

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Many cadets and staff reported that there has been a large increase in focus by USCG leadership, Academy leadership, and cadet leaders on sexual assault and sexual harassment awareness and prevention.

*“The amount that upper leadership has brought it up and the amount of time they spend talking about it when they bring it up has definitely increased during our time here.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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Yet, some cadets and faculty members indicated that they think that while some changes have been made, more can be done.

*“I see the e-mails from the Service, from the Commandant saying ‘we’re going to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment.’ I see these words, I do not see how that’s translated at all.”* – **Faculty, Female**

*“I think yes, there is a stronger message being sent about this is not okay, this is a court-martial offense and we’re going to do that...but...I still think there’s a long way to go.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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Although there is increased comfort with the topics of sexual assault and sexual harassment, cadets and faculty members reported casual conversations rarely focus on these topics. Most discussions happen in the context of trainings, when a sexual assault or harassment case is reported, or when a related news story comes out. Rarely, the subject comes up during a classroom discussion.

*“I think the only time, out of going to CASA [Cadets Against Sexual Assault] and going to the trainings, is probably the Take Back the Night event. And I had one class in my government major that we talked about it for several classes.”*

– **Upperclassman, Female**

*“When a lot of the officers talk they...bring it up but the only [other time] we ever really see [sexual assault and sexual harassment discussed] is if CASA does something or if the SARC has one training a semester.”*

– **Sophomore, Male**

There is a perception on the part of some cadets that the sexual assault and sexual harassment policies favor women and do not focus enough on equitable responsibility for prevention. The feelings around this subject take a number of forms. There is concern among some male cadets they could be unjustly accused:

*“They could say they give consent for that night and in the morning be like ‘What did I do’...and say, ‘I didn’t give consent’ and then turn the tables on that person...in the United States and in the military...we have this whole persona, the guy is sexually assaulting the female and the female is the victim.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

*“I see it as the flaw in the system because...maybe the people...initially both...gave consent while they were unaware...[it could later] escalate to the point where one of them gets prosecuted for it.”* – **Freshman, Male**

Similarly, cadets of both genders said regulations around sexual assault and sexual harassment are inherently biased toward women.

*“I might get in trouble for [sexual harassment], but I don’t think it would be ever to the same extent that the guy would be taken down for.”*

– **Freshman, Female**

*“It’s kind of a double standard because if we walked around saying something as females, there’s less likelihood that we would be reported as somebody else who’s a guy.”* – **Freshman, Female**

*“Sometimes I feel like people...in most cases it’s men, get...screwed over by the laws of what sexual assault is.”* – **Freshman, Male**

Likewise, some cadets reported that not enough focus in trainings is spent on male victims and equal responsibility of males and females in preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*“It is always going to be your fault if you’re a guy...we want...to have a safe environment for everybody here...what we’re talking about here for women is*

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*really, really important but I think there's an aspect for the guys that gets overlooked, too."* – **Freshman, Female**

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### **Sexual Assault**

Cadets commonly conflated the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Questions asked about one would often elicit responses that lump the two together, and it became difficult to separate distinct opinions about each individually. Only when topics relevant to one or the other were discussed was it clear whether sexual assault or sexual harassment was being discussed.

Overall, cadets reported that they perceive the incidence of sexual assault at the Academy to be low. A number of cadets said they feel that it has not changed considerably in recent years, but awareness and comfort in talking about the issue has increased significantly.

*"I don't think the number of sexual assaults increased or decreased a lot, but just the awareness of sexual assault really increased."* – **Sophomore, Male**

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Consensus existed among faculty and cadets that there is a strong focus on sexual assault prevention and a zero tolerance policy in terms of punishment for this offense at the Academy. Cadets begin receiving trainings on prevention, reporting, and regulations on sexual assault during the summer before their freshman year and continue to receive them in various formats throughout their time at the Academy. There are also awareness activities, like Take Back the Night, and other informational sessions hosted by CASA (Cadets Against Sexual Assault), a student-led sexual assault prevention group. Generally, cadets said resources about sexual assault, including those specifically related to reporting, are prevalent and readily available.

Cadets and faculty reported that there has been a change in the communication from Academy and USCG leadership about sexual assault, with the perception being that there have been efforts made to reduce the stigma of sexual assault, including greater dialogue, increased cadet involvement in trainings, and more transparency in discussing cases of sexual assault at the Academy and in the Service at large.

*"CASA...has grown significantly since I've been here and they've really tried to make the training less PowerPoint [with] one person speaking at the cadets and more cadet driven."* – **Upperclassman, Female**

*"I never really felt like there were many trainings...or that much talk about [sexual assault] before...and now...it's a pretty big general focus that...comes up consistently."* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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Cadets expressed an understanding of the importance of the sexual assault awareness and prevention efforts at the Academy. They support these efforts and feel they fit into the framework of personal responsibility and accountability endorsed by the Academy. Further, they internalize their role as it relates to sexual assault prevention.

*“I think it’s everyone’s responsibility starting all the way from the top all the way down. Anyone can be a victim, so I think it should be important to each and every person.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

*“If it’s important to one person’s well-being then it should be important to the majority of the people’s well-being and we should take care of that.”*  
– **Freshman, Female**

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## **Sexual Harassment**

According to many cadets and faculty at the Academy, compared to sexual assault, sexual harassment is less emphasized and is perceived to be less important than sexual assault.

*“I think we do spend a lot of time focusing on sexual assault and reporting that and so on and so forth. But I don’t think they put as much emphasis on sexual harassment.”* – **Faculty, Male**

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When asked directly whether sexual harassment is an issue at the Academy, many cadets agreed with a male upperclassman who asserted, “A hundred times, no.” A male sophomore said, “We don’t really talk about sexual harassment as much and when we do it’s... ‘This person got offended by what this person said, so it’s not anyone’s fault.’”

Likewise, cadets reported they have heard about few, if any sexual harassment cases while at the Academy.

*“My whole experience here, even though it hasn’t been that long yet, I’ve personally not witnessed any type of sexual discrimination or sexual harassment of any kind, especially among classmates.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

*“I can only think of three sexual harassment cases since I’ve been here.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

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The dearth of reported cases can contribute to the perception that sexual harassment is less of a problem than sexual assault. Likewise, cadets may be more likely to hear about sexual assault than sexual harassment because of disciplinary actions that are taken following the report; a male freshman stated, “[Sexual assault reports] are the ones where people end up...being kicked out.” “Definitely if somebody gets kicked out, everyone knows,” confirmed a fellow male freshman.

Another factor contributing to a lower incidence of sexual harassment or the perception that it is not an issue on the Academy campus is it is something cadets tend to self-police. Because the Academy is such a small campus and cadets know and look out for one another, it is difficult for behavior to reach the point of sexual harassment; inappropriate behavior is quickly identified and stopped before it can escalate.

*“I think the issue is...the sexual harassment stops before it gets very serious...I can vaguely remember a few cases our freshman year and it was*

*like someone made one comment and then they're like 'You should stop doing that right now.'*" – **Upperclassman, Female**

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A number of cadets and faculty reported it is common, particularly among male athletes, for horseplay and joking around to occur within the team setting, including slaps on the rear end and swats with a towel in the locker room. However, cadets said it rarely gets out of hand, and it is unlikely to be interpreted as sexual harassment by teammates.

*"Typically with athletes...you're not going to really be as harassed by certain physical contacts in a playful manner or joking manner because that's something that a lot of athletes do, they are participating in contact sports."* – **Freshman, Male**

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Yet there is a perception among others that the atmosphere on sports teams can breed negative behavior, such as hazing, and although team members are unlikely to report this behavior, it could be interpreted by some as harassment.

A few cadets expressed concern that a compliment or other statement intended to be innocent could be perceived as sexual harassment because the rules governing it appear fuzzy; as a result, they feel they must be extremely cautious in what they say, particularly around female cadets. However, several cadets maintained the interpretation of whether a behavior is considered sexual harassment is independent of gender and is impacted by various factors, including the recipient's background and existing relationship with the group.

*"[Interpretation of sexual harassment] can be different person to person. A man can interpret something one way or a woman can also interpret it that way or a different man can interpret it another way and a female can interpret it that same way. There's no consensus among each sex...There's a...wide spectrum."* – **Freshman, Male**

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## **Bystander Intervention**

Because the Academy culture emphasizes the responsibility of cadets to watch out for and respect one other and an obligation to uphold a high moral standard in their day-to-day activities, student self-policing and bystander intervention are seen as a key to preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment. Cadets also reported fear of repercussions for not stepping in or reporting an at-risk situation (i.e., one that could lead to sexual assault or sexual harassment) may serve as a prime motivator for cadets to take action. The subject of self-policing and bystander intervention as a means of reducing sexual assault and sexual harassment is increasingly discussed and promoted during Academy trainings, and most faculty and cadets reported they feel confident cadets are likely to step in if they witness a threatening situation.

*"I think a lot of students here, from what I've seen, most people are not afraid to call each other out.... 'Hey, don't do that, you need to stop.'"*  
– **Freshman, Female**

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*“People here have such a high sense of character and loyalty, that if you see something that to you doesn’t look right or feel right to you, I’m pretty sure most of us would jump in and try to stop it.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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However, not all faculty members agreed cadets have the confidence or wherewithal to step in. They referred to situations they encountered in which cadets were too petrified or unsure in the moment to do anything, although in some cases the cadets attempted to help after the fact or later reported the situation.

*“They don’t know how to stand up for themselves...[particularly freshman]...there’s a lot of learning that they’re still getting.”*  
– **Faculty, Female**

*“I don’t think they mean to look the other way but they don’t necessarily have the self-confidence to speak up.” – Faculty, Male*

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Cadets described potential barriers to intervening or reporting an assault as a bystander. Cadets said that alcohol is one such factor—if bystanders have been drinking, they may be less likely to recognize a potentially risky situation, may be less attuned to cues than they would normally be, and may be more generally accepting of inappropriate behavior.

*“If you are at a party and you are drunk too and you see it happening, you may not...recognize right away that it’s about to be sexual assault.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

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The location of the at-risk behavior can also make it less likely that a cadet might intervene. When a cadet is out of uniform and removed from the insulated campus environment, he or she may not be in the mindset of looking out for fellow cadets and acting in accordance with the rules and standards of the Academy. Likewise, the unique dynamic created by interactions with civilians and other people whom cadets do not know can make them confused about if and how they should intervene. Similarly, cadets may be uncertain about the reporting rules when they are off campus, and cadets are more likely to be doing something that could get themselves in trouble when they are not on campus, which could make them wary of the impact that intervening or reporting might have on themselves.

*“[Off campus] they might feel uncomfortable or [that] it’s not their place to do anything about it.” – Sophomore, Male*

*“I feel like the intervening is most likely in the barracks but if it was like a cadet/civilian type situation, it may be different...it’s a lesser understanding of that interaction.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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The relationship status of the people engaging in at-risk behavior could also deter a cadet from intervening or reporting when they witness a situation that has the potential to be sexual assault. Cadets may assume at-risk behavior between cadets who are in an existing romantic relationship

is acceptable or there is inherent consent between the parties involved. Alternately, they may be less likely to notice inappropriate behavior because they are used to seeing a couple together. Moreover, they may turn a blind eye because they see the situation as too complicated and feel uncomfortable getting involved.

*“If I saw a boyfriend/girlfriend...I wouldn’t [actually] see them...at first glance I wouldn’t think anything was going on.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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A few cadets stated that they may avoid intervening in a potentially risky situation because they fear they might get in trouble themselves for engaging in prohibited behaviors like drinking or fraternization.

*“More often than not it’s hands off completely because people just don’t want to get involved...you are going to do something that’s going to get you in trouble and you don’t want people...turning you in.” – Freshman, Female*

*“If they were drinking and you were drinking...but you’re not supposed to be drinking at the time...then I feel like people would be afraid to go and stop something...you have to choose between helping somebody and avoiding getting in trouble.” – Freshman, Male*

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## Role of Alcohol

Both faculty and cadets reported that they perceive alcohol use increases the risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment among cadets at the Academy. They identified a few reasons why this phenomenon might occur: when cadets drink they might become less able to discern the line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, drinking by one or both parties makes it challenging to establish consent. Cadets who are intoxicated are less conscious of their actions and concerned with the well-being of others, and cadets might be vulnerable to making poor decisions or behaving in a way they would not while sober.

*“I think [sexual assault] is more common when there’s alcohol involved...alcohol impairs your judgment...they call it liquid courage, you want to do stuff you typically wouldn’t do.” – Freshman, Female*

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Faculty reported that almost all of the cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment that they encountered—either in their time as a cadet or in their teaching tenure at the Academy—have involved alcohol consumption. They said they have seen instances in which a cadet preyed on the vulnerability of fellow cadets who were drinking. Likewise, they came across situations in which inebriated male cadets sexually harassed female cadets via lewd texts or social media posts. Cadets expressed a similar belief that most incidents of sexual assault involve alcohol.

*“[Alcohol] definitely increases risk. The cases I have heard about...involved alcohol at one point or another.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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The topic of consent came up frequently when cadets were asked about the role of alcohol in sexual assault. The importance of obtaining consent before engaging in sexual relations is discussed during sexual assault training and is understood to be particularly relevant when alcohol has been consumed by one or both parties engaged in sexual relations. These trainings emphasize that consent cannot be guaranteed when alcohol has been consumed. Cadets generally understand the importance of obtaining consent and that alcohol can complicate the ability to do so. Several cadets reported that they have learned through training that, ultimately, if someone has been drinking, they do not have the cognitive wherewithal to consent to any type of sexual contact.

*“As soon as alcohol is in play you lose all of your [ability to] consent...once you’re consuming alcohol you can’t make a decision.”*

– **Sophomore, Female**

*“[Both parties] may perceive it [as] being consensual and she might [even] agree if she weren’t drunk, but...she cannot give legal consent.”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

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Cadets are unsure, however, whether a sexual assault can be reported if alcohol is involved. Likewise, some cadets reported that there is a gray area in determining whether consent has been obtained for sexual contact when either party has been drinking; they maintained that there are situations in which the question of consent is not clear-cut as it relates to alcohol. Some cadets expressed confusion about where to draw the line when determining how much alcohol can be consumed before consent is unobtainable.

*“[There is] that gray area: is it really assault if both parties are under the influence and consenting?”* – **Freshman, Male**

*“There’s a fine line between when the person is able to consent, depending on how much alcohol they are drinking, and it’s hard to tell if you have drunk too much [or] how much another person has drunk.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

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There is also a desire for additional training for responsible use of alcohol, particularly guidance as it relates to sexual conduct and relationships.

*“There’s never any guidance on how to drink responsibly...and they don’t talk about sex...[except to say] don’t sexually harass people and sexual assault is bad. They don’t talk about things like how drunk is too drunk to consent.”* – **Upperclassman, Male**

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## **Other Factors in Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment**

Faculty members and cadets were asked about additional issues that may impact the prevalence or perception of sexual assault and sexual harassment among cadets at the Academy. Two factors that were brought up frequently during these discussions were location as a potential risk

factor for sexual assault and challenges in identifying sexual assault or harassment within existing cadet relationships.

### **Location**

There is a perception among Academy faculty and cadets that sexual assault and sexual harassment are more likely to happen off campus because people who are not in the Coast Guard will not have the same values, alcohol is more likely to be a factor, there will be a mix of ages and backgrounds, and cadets may be less vigilant. Cadets are told when they start at the Academy to be wary of certain situations, such as walking alone in New London and attending parties at Connecticut College (referred to as “Conn College”), a civilian university across the street from the Academy. Cadets, in turn, internalize these messages and echo them when asked about locations that may put cadets at risk for sexual assault or sexual harassment. They also refer to their own experiences while at the Academy and warnings they have heard from fellow cadets about which environments to avoid because of safety concerns. Faculty and cadets consistently said that off-campus parties and other social activities at civilian colleges or in nearby cities are particularly risky.

*“I’d say be careful of going to Conn College because...[it has] an allure of normal college life and [students there] don’t have the same values that our cadets have been taught to have.” – Faculty, Female*

*“I think on campus a [dangerous] situation is a lot less likely to occur...I would say be careful if you go downtown in the bars...[or] just any time you’re [on leave] and go out to the city, [like] Boston, New York.”  
– Upperclassman, Female*

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### **Existing Relationships**

In general, cadets understand sexual assault and sexual harassment can happen within the confines of a romantic relationship but are uncertain as to how they can recognize such a situation. Cadets reported they know of other cadets who have experienced it or they can imagine scenarios where it might occur. Similarly, they recognize consent plays a role within existing romantic relationships, just as it does any time sexual contact is involved, and it cannot be assumed based on previous consent or relationship status.

*“I don’t think relationship implies consent...I don’t think just because you claim he’s your boyfriend or girlfriend that you automatically can just do whatever you want.” – Sophomore, Male*

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Yet cadets expressed a desire for more clarity in teasing apart the nuances of the role consent plays regarding sexual activity within a relationship. Likewise, they are unsure as to how they might recognize a situation in which someone is being treated inappropriately within a romantic relationship and what they can do to help.

*“I think it might be [difficult] when it comes to judging how to intervene [in an existing relationship] because...relationships [are] different than how you*

*might perceive [them] ... [especially] when you've seen this happen before, you've seen them argue and you know they're just going to forgive each other later...it creates a gray area."* – **Freshman, Male**

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Further, cadets conveyed an interest in obtaining information on healthy relationships in the context of discussions and information sessions on sexual assault and sexual harassment. Faculty members agreed that a larger discussion about romantic relationships is needed in which cadets learn communication skills and what it means for a relationship to be healthy and respectful, since they are still young and learning the intricacies of navigating social interactions.

*"We fail to talk about healthy relationships in general."*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

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## Reporting and Retaliation

Cadets and faculty members were asked about their general perceptions of reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, their understanding of the options for reporting, the resources available to them for reporting, the potential barriers to reporting, and the prevalence of retaliation for reporting.

Cadets reported that they understand the procedures for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, but their perception was mixed on whether they feel comfortable reporting. There is a general sense some may be fearful of the process or consequences of reporting and, therefore, are less likely to do so. When cadets do report, they said they are much more likely to report sexual assault versus sexual harassment and are also more likely to report a sexual assault that is more severe. Some participants stated cadets are more likely to report a sexual assault that is more "forceful," whereas others indicated that there are certain situations that are "not serious" enough to report and should be handled by cadets first.

Some faculty members and cadets argued that the increase in the number of reports the Academy has seen over recent years is a testament to the success of trainings and the comfort cadets feel in reporting.

*"[The increased number of trainings and discussions around sexual assault and sexual harassment] explain the reason why we see more cases about it...people are not afraid...to hide it, they're more comfortable to come up and say, 'You know what, the Coast Guard is willing to help me through this process.'" – Faculty, Male*

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Cadets and faculty members reported that they perceive male cadets at the Academy may be less likely to report incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment due to obstacles such as greater stigma around male victims, fear of social ostracism or loss of reputation because they will not be perceived as manly (particularly in "lesser" cases), insufficient support from leadership, and because male cadets may be less likely to interpret behavior as sexual assault or sexual harassment versus female cadets, as a result of certain behaviors being normalized and accepted among male groups (e.g., locker room banter/hazing).

*“It’s hard for a woman to report [sexual assault and sexual harassment] in the military environment, [so] I’m sure it’s even harder for a male to report.”*  
– **Faculty, Female**

*“Personally, I wouldn’t [report sexual assault or harassment]. Unless I was [physically] harmed or something, I wouldn’t do it.”* – **Freshman, Male**

## **Familiarity with Reporting Options**

Cadets and faculty were asked about their general thoughts and understanding regarding the reporting options—restricted and unrestricted—available to them for sexual assault and sexual harassment, along with their perception of student-led groups and other resources available to them for reporting.

### ***Restricted Reporting***

Cadets expressed that they have a clear idea of what situations might merit a restricted report and that there are specific procedures to be followed when filing a restricted report, which unlike an unrestricted report, is kept confidential, does not automatically lead to an investigation, and can only be taken by a trained Victims Advocate (VA). Cadets appreciated having an option for restricted reporting because it allows for greater privacy and control over the reporting process as well as flexibility, since a restricted report can be made unrestricted at a later date. They agreed for the most part that there are a sufficient number of people who can take restricted reports but said at times, it could be difficult to find someone with whom they are comfortable talking. Cadets reported they are more likely to file a restricted report for cases that they want medical attention or to talk to someone without initiating a formal investigation. The main drawbacks to making a restricted report are the limited number of people who are authorized to take these reports and the situations in which cadets have felt pressured to file an unrestricted report.

*“[A friend] said that when she tried to report...they tried to pressure her into making it unrestricted, so that person would be punished. I understand why leadership would do that...but it’s not creating a very good climate for reporting.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

Faculty and cadets also said it can be a challenge if they have a cadet share a situation with them if they are not authorized to take a restricted report, because they are obligated to report it up the chain of command and it automatically becomes unrestricted. They suggested having additional people who are trained to take restricted reports or changing the rules to allow for more flexibility in providing restricted reports.

*“If you happened to tell the wrong person, then you automatically have to do unrestricted. And maybe they didn’t necessarily want that, they wanted to confide in a friend and ‘Hey, this happened to me.’”* – **Sophomore, Female**

## **Unrestricted Reporting**

Students and faculty members indicated that they feel trainings clearly explain the differences between restricted and unrestricted reporting; however, the differences can become confusing or difficult to remember when in the moment.

*“I think for the most part people understand that there’s a difference between restricted and unrestricted reports, but I think it’s kind of confusing...I think they try to explain it to us but a lot of times during trainings...it’s going in one ear and out the other.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

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Unrestricted reports occur less frequently because they require a formal investigation process to be initiated and allow for very little privacy for the parties involved. The strict rules that are in place regarding who cadets can go to for a restricted versus unrestricted report mean cadets must be careful when discussing potentially sensitive information with fellow cadets and staff.

*“If someone comes to you and you’re just their friend and they tell you something that happened, automatically you’re supposed to report that [to a designated party]—because they now opened themselves up to an unrestricted report.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

*“If...a cadet comes in and starts telling you a story and you’re not a victim advocate...you are in an awkward position, you tell them to stop talking. Whatever you tell me I’m going to have to take up the chain of command.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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Cadets also said if a bystander or other third party reports sexual assault or sexual harassment, the report automatically becomes unrestricted, which means a loss of privacy and control for the parties involved.

*“Once someone else intervenes it automatically becomes an unrestricted report...now that you have intervened you are opening up the other two people to an investigation where pretty much everything in their personal relationship and lives is going to become public knowledge.”* – **Sophomore, Female**

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## **Student Groups**

Cadets reported that student-led trainings and resources are readily available and effective. CASA, a student-led sexual assault group, has a large presence on campus and provides trained student victim advocates, leads sexual assault awareness events and effective trainings, and offers other relevant resources. Additionally, there are other student victim advocates and counselors available; cadets can find a list of these advocates in bathrooms and dorms, as well as online. Any of the victim advocates can take restricted reports; all other cadets can take unrestricted reports. Cadets said they really like having fellow students who are able to advocate for victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment, who can take restricted reports, and who can

provide more relatable trainings—both they and faculty members consistently praised CASA as an important and valuable resource at the Academy.

*“The Cadets Against Sexual Assault club... [is] really important...because [it] can be...that first avenue to help people through something.”*

– **Faculty, Male**

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Some faculty members suggested training additional CASA members as victim advocates so that they are better able to help cadets.

*“If we want to have [CASA] be part of the solution to the problem. We should be able to empower them with the title of being victim advocates.”*

– **Faculty, Male**

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### **Other Resources for Reporting**

Cadets stated there are many other resources for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment geared toward students at the Academy. Any faculty member can take unrestricted reports. Several faculty members who are trained as victim advocates can take restricted reports, as can medical personnel, a priest, and a psychologist on campus. The SARC is the primary contact for sexual assault and sexual harassment guidance and reporting. There is also extensive information available on campus (e.g., bathrooms, dorms, conference rooms) regarding who to go to for reporting an incident. Numerous trainings incorporate reporting options—both online and in person—and a hotline is available for students to call to talk to someone 24 hours a day. Some participants argued that cadets may have difficulty finding adequate resources for reporting while off campus and suggested providing additional information to cadets on this topic.

*“If we were going on leave...I would say most people wouldn’t really know who to talk to other than their parents...[I would suggest] trying to raise the awareness.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

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### **Barriers to Reporting**

Cadets and faculty members were asked about the various barriers that might keep cadets from reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment, either barriers that have happened to them or that they have witnessed. They were also asked about their perception of the prevalence of retaliation for reporting at the Academy. Cadets and faculty members consistently identified a number of obstacles to reporting, including fear of punishment, fear of retaliation, fear of getting someone else in trouble, and gray areas caused by confounding circumstances (e.g., cadet rank and existing romantic relationship). They also identified a few sexual harassment-specific barriers.

#### **Fear of Punishment**

Cadets reported that the fear of punishment is a significant reason people might not report an event like sexual assault. Cadets indicated that they fear if they report an event—whether they



are involved or they witness it—they could implicate themselves for prohibited behavior they were engaged in at the time. Alcohol use and fraternization are the most commonly reported behaviors cadets fear admitting to and risking punishment.

*“It makes people afraid to report...because they’re afraid they’ll get in trouble for something else...like...an alcohol offense or a frat[ernization] offense.”* – **Freshman, Female**

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Faculty affirmed that these cases do get punished—typically, the main reported offense (e.g., assault) is investigated and punished first, and then any secondary offenses are adjudicated. Yet, whenever possible, the secondary offense receives the lowest permissible punishment, so as not to deter cadets from reporting. These rules that are in place at the Academy introduce a moral dilemma that cadets must struggle with when determining whether to report.

*“It should never be a hard choice but in the moment you have to choose between helping somebody and avoiding getting in trouble.”*  
– **Freshman, Female**

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Cadets begin to weigh certain factors about the situation when making that decision, such as the seriousness of the accusation and whether they are the victim or a bystander.

*“People work so hard to get here and stay here that they don’t want to risk it for [a situation in which] it’s not that big of a deal [or] it’s not about me.”*  
– **Freshman, Male**

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The fear of getting into trouble can also extend to situations that do not involve reporting but simply involve helping a fellow cadet who has had too much to drink or is in a similarly risky position.

*“Sometimes the cadets...will be worried about helping a friend [who’s] intoxicated [back to campus]...they’re worried about helping that friend get back safely because they think they are also going to get an alcohol incident [themselves]. Even though we tell them repeatedly we want you to take care of your shipmates and do the right thing...they would still be afraid to say something.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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Some cadets said they would readily report sexual assault or sexual harassment and risk the consequences for doing so simply because it is the right thing to do, and by not doing so, they would be letting down their fellow cadets and not upholding the high moral standards of the Academy. Others asserted, however, they would be more likely to report if they could guarantee that they would not get in trouble.

*“If [Academy leadership] is going to use you being honorable and self-reporting against you, it doesn’t really make you want to self-report.”*  
– **Sophomore, Male**

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## ***Fear of Social Retaliation or Professional Reprisal***

Cadets and faculty members were asked about barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment related to a fear of social retaliation or professional reprisal. Both cadets and faculty members agreed that retaliation is most likely to occur in the form of damage to someone's reputation or social ostracism, and it would be rare to see any professional reprisal as a result of reporting.

**Reputation.** Cadets indicated that they perceive fear of damaging ones' reputation—either because they are seen as ratting others out or being blamed for the event itself—can be a barrier to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. Cadets further stated the stigma of simply being associated with reporting can impact their reputation and is a strong motivator against reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. They do not want to be the cadet everyone is talking about or thinks less of in some way, particularly because at the Academy and in the Coast Guard—both of which are so small—reputation is everything.

*“It’s a 100% reputation...that person got a reputation of being really hard or [a] reputation of [you’ve] got to watch yourself around him...and because the Coast Guard is small that reputation follows you even out of the Academy.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“You’ll be judged for it...she’s the girl that got all of these people in trouble because they were at that party...if she goes to a party she’s going to rat us all out.” – Freshman, Female*

**Victim-Blaming.** According to cadets, victim-blaming is a specific form of damage to one's reputation. Victim-blaming can manifest in several ways, all of which are aimed at ruining a Cadet's reputation by retaliating against them for reporting. The cadet may be accused of false reporting, be told he or she is at fault for making himself or herself vulnerable or behaving in a way that led to the sexual assault or sexual harassment, or be told that the event is not serious enough to merit getting someone in trouble. Concern about being blamed can make a victim less likely to come forward to report an incident. Cadets may be justified in their concern: many cadets in all classes stated victim-blaming occurs at the Academy, particularly when alcohol is involved, the victim is viewed as promiscuous, or there is a prior relationship between the purported victim and assailant. Faculty agreed and said the trainings often perpetuate negative stereotypes about sexual assault that lead to victim-blaming; for example, if a female drinks too much, she is leaving herself vulnerable to getting attacked.

*“People say it’s the woman’s fault because she was drunk...and I think the atmosphere here is [that] it’s not acceptable to say those types of things. But maybe among friend groups people would [do it].” – Freshman, Female*

*“If you don’t want to be sexually assaulted [you] shouldn’t have gotten drunk and shouldn’t have been flirting.” – Freshman, Male*

During the conversation about victim-blaming and loss of reputation, the subject of false reporting was brought up by cadets on several occasions, primarily by those who claimed to have heard of a situation in which it occurred and also by cadets who have overheard others talking about it. In spite of education to dispel myths about false reporting, there is a misconception, on the part of a few at the Academy, that false reporting is common and might occur because someone wants to get a fellow cadet in trouble or because he or she is embarrassed by their behavior and does not want to be held accountable for their actions. Male cadets are more likely to hold these beliefs, and female cadets are seen as the ones most likely to make a false accusation. Rhetoric around this issue from those who believe it is a problem breeds fear in those who might report as they themselves could be accused of false reporting, and in turn, this fear could prevent them from reporting.

*“When you hear cadets talking about the past sexual assault cases...where two people get caught doing something and the girl says it was rape and the guy gets in trouble. I’ve definitely heard on multiple occasions ‘Oh, she just did that because she regretted it.’”* – **Freshman, Female**

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A fellow female cadet warned this damaging attitude on the part of some is ingrained.

*“I remember hearing somebody explicitly say, ‘Third class boys, don’t date Academy girls because if you get caught with them doing anything they’ll call it rape and then [you’re] going to be screwed.’”* – **Freshman, Female**

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**Fitting In.** Cadets and faculty members indicated that they perceive that fear of ostracism, or retaliation through social isolation by various means, is a central barrier to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment at the Academy. Fear of ostracism can be a powerful motivator toward not reporting because cadets are driven by a strong desire for approval from fellow cadets and a need to fit in with their peers. For the most part, cadets reported that ostracism is subtle and difficult to document for the purposes of punishment, yet is persistent and insidious. It can be as simple as friends avoiding you on campus, ignoring you on social media, excluding you from social events, or talking negatively about you behind your back.

*“I’ve seen retaliation, just a lot of people gossiping...you know everyone is talking about it even though you’re not supposed to talk about it.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Female**

*“You’re not a part of the group anymore...[you’re an] outcast...we were friends two days, five days ago, but now you don’t exist.”*  
– **Upperclassman, Male**

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Some cadets, however, disagreed that someone would be ostracized for reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment.

*“With something this big, I don’t think anyone, especially here, would get mad at the reporter...for being honest and reporting the situation.”*  
– **Sophomore, Male**

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*“If it was involving sexual assault, sexual harassment, if someone reports that, typically they have a pretty good reason for it, so I don’t think they [would] be retaliated for that here.” – Sophomore, Male*

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**Career Concerns.** Cadets reported that although social retaliation is a concern and a potential barrier for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy, concerns about damage to one’s career for reporting are not an issue. Cadets reported that they feel supported by their leadership at the Academy and within the Coast Guard at large and that any reports will be taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, and not be perceived negatively.

*“You’re not going to get a bad evaluation or anything but you’re going to have all of your peers talking about it.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“[Reporting has the potential to impact] ...social standing [more] than career standing...[cadets think] it’s not going to affect their career; social standing is their primary concern.” – Faculty, Male*

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### **The Reporting Process**

Cadets and faculty members were asked about barriers within the process of reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both groups agreed the reporting and investigation process can be overly burdensome and expose cadets to invasion of privacy, making the process itself an obstacle to reporting.

**Strenuous Formal Process.** Cadets and faculty indicated the reporting process, particularly for unrestricted reports, is lengthy and strenuous, consisting of extensive paperwork, interviews, and a Mast process in which those who are named in the report have to appear before Academy leadership to plead their cases. The Mast process can drag on for months. They said these factors are strong deterrents to reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment. Cadets also asserted they are less likely to report cases they do not perceive as very serious because the process is so cumbersome. Further, the process can be burdensome on many people other than those directly involved in the incident (e.g., witnesses and family members/friends), which can serve as an additional disincentive to reporting. Cadets feared being forced to relive the event repeatedly and then dragging other people who they care about through the process as well. Students and staff said before reporting, cadets are likely to ask themselves some key questions to determine if the situation merits reporting, including about the severity of the incident, what type of report they want to make, the potential outcomes of the report, and who the report might impact, in order to determine whether it is worth it for them to file.

*“I think it’s a tough bridge to cross...when you are forced with making this decision. ‘What’s going to happen afterwards? How long is this going to take? Is this something I want to get involved in?’ There is always that crossroads.” – Faculty, Male*

*“We’re in an environment where we’re constantly busy and reporting might be this very long process that you have to go through, all of this paperwork*

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*and you know it's going to affect your academics, so I think that could be a reason that you might not want to report.” – Freshman, Male*

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**Lack of Privacy.** Cadets and faculty members reported that the lack of privacy inherent to the reporting process could make cadets less likely to report sexual assault or sexual harassment. Cadets do not want their peers to know the details about what happened; they are embarrassed and concerned people will not see them the same way and they will be forever associated with the incident. Further, there is a perception among cadets that when information about a report leaks, it usually consists of misinformation and cadets do not have the ability to defend themselves and correct this information with their peers. Since cadets do not have control over information that comes out and who is brought into the process, they may feel powerless. Cadets also may not feel they can trust those who are in charge of handling the report and investigation.

*“[Cadets may] mistrust [that] what they say to the victim advocate or SARC is truly going to be kept confidential.” – Faculty, Male*

*“The school has like a thousand people, of course everyone is going to hear about it in four days and it just becomes this seedy thing that everyone talks about and everybody has the wrong facts.” – Upperclassman, Female*

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### **Sexual Harassment-Specific Barriers**

In conversations with cadets and faculty members regarding barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, there was consensus that sexual harassment is less likely to get reported than sexual assault, and a few barriers specific to sexual harassment were mentioned. Cadets stated the fuzziness around the definition of sexual harassment, a perception less serious offenses should be handled at the cadet level, and a fear of being judged as weak for reporting a “minor” incident are all reasons why cadets might choose not to report.

**Unclear Definition.** As discussed previously, there is confusion among cadets as to what constitutes sexual harassment. Although cadets said they have been given definitions, they uniformly agreed that there is gray area when it comes to the interpretation of sexual harassment. This lack of understanding about sexual harassment makes it challenging for cadets to know whether they are experiencing or witnessing sexual harassment in their day-to-day lives. When they are unsure, they are more likely to dismiss an incident or err toward assuming it is not a problem, rather than reporting it.

**Cadet-Level Issues.** Both cadets and faculty reported that the Academy encourages cadets to manage disagreements and other interpersonal situations among themselves and likewise handle any situations at the lowest level possible, only elevating them when absolutely necessary. This cultural expectation could have the effect of preventing reporting, since cadets may perceive that a complaint is not serious enough to warrant an official report. Cadets are likely to talk directly to a classmate with whom they are having an issue to try to resolve the conflict or to share the experience and request advice from a friend or close confidant.

*“I think it’s important to go and talk to them and say, ‘Hey, this behavior is really not alright,’ before you go straight to reporting them for it.”*

– **Freshman, Male**

*“We...train them from a very early stage not to use the formal systems here....do it all informally. Talk to them. Find an alternative thing that doesn’t get documented. Never [do] anything that gets documented.”*

– **Faculty, Male**

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Additionally, the environment at the Academy breeds an attitude among cadets that they should be strong and capable, so they may feel uncomfortable showing vulnerability and asking for help. Cadets do not want to be seen as weak, so they may dismiss cases of harassment as minor because in their minds, the lack of physical harm negates a crime was committed. Likewise, since it is “only” harassment, they said they feel they can and should be able to handle it on their own.

### **Other Barriers**

Cadets reported additional barriers to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment, including fear of getting fellow cadets in trouble, rank structure at the Academy, and the impact of existing romantic relationships.

***Fear of Getting Others in Trouble.*** Cadets reported a desire to not implicate or negatively impact the career of fellow cadets as a reason they may not report sexual assault or sexual harassment. Cadets are concerned that as a result of reporting an incident, witnesses who must testify about the circumstances of the event will be punished for prohibited behavior they were engaging in at the time. The closeness of the cadets at the Academy also contributes to the reluctance to report; in spite of a cadet’s inappropriate behavior, fellow cadets are likely to feel protective and forgiving of him or her and want to avoid getting him or her in trouble. This barrier applies to both potential victims and bystanders who may consider reporting.

*“Going to such a small school...there’s a 90% chance that you are close to someone at the party or you are close to someone who is close to someone at the party, so...you think you are screwing someone over.”*

– **Freshman, Female**

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Further, by reporting an incident, a cadet risks angering fellow cadets, particularly if those who get in trouble are well liked. Cadets may be blamed for another cadet getting punished or kicked out of the Academy. Some faculty suggested the messaging around what it means to report and the impact of reporting should be modified, since the Academy’s culture can influence cadets’ likelihood to report.

*“It’s part of the culture to avoid discipline...cadets perceive discipline as being bad, but discipline is development...And I think that’s part of the culture that leads to the fact that people don’t talk about it, they don’t report it, they don’t feel comfortable asking people for help.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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**Rank Structure.** Cadets reported fellow cadets may be less likely to report sexual assault or sexual harassment if the perpetrator is a higher rank/class than they are. They said they feel uncomfortable reporting or standing up to someone who is a higher class or rank than they are due to the power differential. They indicated that they perceive that the person who has been at the Academy longer and is higher ranked is more likely to be believed and also have more friends and connections within the Academy and Coast Guard, making a complaint against them riskier. Cadets may worry they will incur anger or reprisal from other cadets by reporting, particularly freshman cadets, who do not know many people, are less comfortable in the environment, and are restricted in their personal power on campus compared to the other classes.

*“We do have a big power difference in some of the cadet structure...there probably are some more junior people who may not feel as able to speak up or bring something to someone’s attention because...they see some of the more senior folks [as] more untouchable.” – Faculty, Female*

*“I think you’d be more likely to see a cadet who’s at the same peer level as the person about to do something wrong, calling them out, versus somebody who’s a lot more junior to that person...It’s the military structure, there’s a gap there and sometimes people just don’t feel comfortable speaking truth to power.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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**Romantic Relationships.** Cadets said fellow cadets are less likely to report sexual assault or sexual harassment within the confines of an existing romantic relationship. Cadets indicated that they perceive being in a relationship may serve to muddy consent and create an environment in which complex feelings of loyalty, love, and even fear take over and prevent what should be a cadet’s natural response to their partner’s inappropriate or disturbing behavior. Cadets may feel that because they are (or were) involved in a romantic relationship with an individual, they owe them something or cannot say “no” because previous consent was given. Similarly, they may feel ashamed they “allowed” it to happen or fearful their history together will make others skeptical. They may also have a tendency to minimize, make excuses for, or forgive negative behavior by a partner because they care about him/her and value the relationship. Further, they may be enduring a pattern of emotional or physical abuse, making them feel at once trapped by and intensely connected to their partner. As a result, cadets may avoid reporting sexual assault or sexual harassment out of guilt, concern about hurting or angering their partner, feelings of helplessness, anxiety about how fellow cadets will react, or anguish over losing the relationship.

*“If you are in a relationship with somebody and [an incident happens], [other cadets] are going to see it as, ‘You guys, you’ve been together before, this wasn’t an issue before so why is it an issue now’.” – Freshman, Female*

*“A bigger part of it is you’re in a relationship with that person, you’re sleeping with them, you really like them, you might even say you love them...what are you willing to give up for that?” – Freshman, Female*

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## Prevalence of Retaliation

Cadets and faculty members were asked about the prevalence of retaliation for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy, either social or professional. Both groups agreed retaliation, when occurs, is most likely to take the form of ostracism and damage a cadet's reputation rather than any professional reprisal. However, cadets and faculty members were mixed on their perceptions of the frequency of social retaliation and the methods employed to carry it out.

Social retaliation at the Academy can occur via social media or in person; when it occurs, it is often subtle and difficult to punish. Ostracism is particularly covert, since it typically consists of a cadet being shunned by former friends or made to feel like an outcast—making it challenging to identify. Cadets may engage in these behaviors either in person (e.g., not speaking to someone, avoiding them on campus) or online (e.g., unfriending them on Facebook, removing photos from sharing sites, ignoring messages). Social retaliation that takes the form of damage to one's reputation is more overt but can still be subtle; it may involve rumors and gossip as well as negative social media posts about a cadet.

Many cadets said they have witnessed retaliation for reporting—both ostracism and purposeful intent to damage a fellow cadet's reputation. Retaliation on social media, although it occurs, is not tremendously prevalent at the Academy, according to cadets and faculty. Although some theorized social media allows people to feel more protected in their ability to harass without consequence, others argued most social media accounts allow users to be identified, so cadets are not emboldened by anonymity and may be less likely to retaliate for risk of castigation by fellow cadets or Academy leadership. If cadets do engage in retaliation on social media, they are careful to not incriminate themselves, knowing they are being monitored. Cadets reported that a few incidents of retaliation on social media have been self-policed by cadets or reported to and stopped by Academy leadership. No matter the type or means used for social retaliation, cadets and faculty agreed the subtle nature of the behaviors associated with it result in very few, if anyone, being prosecuted.

*“If there's an investigation going on, no one is going to post anything [on social media]. Even if they do, it's so vague that only certain people pick up on it, but for the most part most people stay off of [it].”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

*“I think stuff like Twitter is famous for people venting...you don't use any names, but if you are in that situation or you go to the school and you follow the person, nine times out of 10 you know who they are talking about.”*

– **Freshman, Female**

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## Training and Prevention

Many trainings that are aimed at education and prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment are conducted at the Academy—some are targeted toward cadets and others toward faculty. Cadets and faculty members were asked about their perceptions of these trainings at the



Academy, including effectiveness, content, and format, and were asked to provide feedback on what could be done to improve these trainings.

## Effectiveness

Cadets and faculty members were each asked about the general effectiveness of their targeted trainings for sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy. Cadets were also asked about the impact of the facilitator on trainings, the trainings' perceived relevance, and factors that contribute to training fatigue.

## Student Training

According to cadets, they receive a number of trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment over the course of their time at the Academy, beginning during "swab summer" prior to their freshman year. Some trainings are administered annually, and others are one-time events or educational sessions. These trainings are primarily delivered in a large-group setting, may be led by groups or individuals, and may use an online or in-person format.

**General Effectiveness.** Students and faculty generally indicated that they believe sexual assault and sexual harassment training for cadets at the Academy is effective. Cadets reported that they feel the trainings drive home the message from Coast Guard and Academy leadership that sexual assault and sexual harassment will not be tolerated at the Academy. They also said trainings provide useful educational content, promote awareness of the importance of sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention, improve cadets' knowledge of reporting options, and increase the comfort level in discussing these topics. Cadets had mixed feelings on whether the current trainings result in fewer cases of sexual assault and sexual harassment but agreed that they may make people more likely to report these incidents or intervene as a bystander to prevent a situation from escalating.

*"[Training might] actually increase the numbers [reported] because [cadets] are more comfortable coming forward...It can stop it from happening and help with reporting."* – **Faculty, Male**

*"Two years ago, I didn't really know a whole lot about sexual assault. I would be less likely to do something...compared to now, where I know more about it and know more of the signs of it, so I probably would be more likely to prevent it."* – **Sophomore, Male**

**Facilitator and Format Impact.** Cadets were asked about the most effective facilitators and formats for sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings at the Academy. They consistently agreed the many trainings on these topics at the Academy are not all equally effective. Cadets felt the in-person trainings with fellow cadets or the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) were most useful. Trainings from fellow cadets, particularly upperclassmen, feel most impactful because cadets relate and look up to them. Likewise, trainings from both facilitators feel personal because the content can be tailored to their needs and perspectives. Cadets also said the SARC lends credibility and authenticity to the trainings because the instructor is seen as qualified and as someone who cares about the cadets. Online or PowerPoint trainings in large

groups are less effective because the content is standardized and could be perceived as outdated or irrelevant. Moreover, cadets could easily tune out or breeze through the material without absorbing the information. Additionally, many of these large group trainings are long and are held early in the morning, making it less likely cadets will have the mindset or attention to get the most from them. There was an attitude among cadets that many of the sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings at the Academy serve the purpose of “checking a box” for leadership, without having any real effect in terms of awareness or behavior change.

*“[Regarding the] online trainings...I just want to be done...click, click, click, click, click. Take the test, done. Smaller settings I think are helpful...It’s very, very hard had to get that interaction [with large groups] ...just because of the pure number of people.”* – **Freshman, Female**

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**Perceived Relevance.** Students and staff agreed that many of the sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings feel irrelevant. Many cadets indicated that they feel the scenarios provided in trainings are outdated or are not ones that are relevant to their everyday lives, so they are less likely to pay attention and internalize the information—they say the trainings do not prepare them for the real world. Faculty suggested that some of the trainings cadets see now are similar to the ones they themselves had many years ago and are much less impactful than they could be if they were updated to reflect issues currently facing the cadets.

*“I feel like the training is about the same that I got in the early ‘90s. It’s a little more formalized, a little bit more [likely to] bring in outside groups, but otherwise it’s about the same.”* – **Faculty, Male**

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Cadets also reported a lot of the trainings do not feel meaningful because the content is information they already know. They argued that people at the Academy hold themselves to a high standard and that having extensive trainings on sexual assault or sexual harassment is not necessary. Similarly, there was a sense that the cadets who engage in sexual assault or sexual harassment do not represent the Academy and are “bad eggs” whose attitudes toward sexual assault or sexual harassment are not going to be impacted significantly by trainings.

*“[They are] preaching to the choir in a way because, sure, we have to take the trainings but if you are getting accepted to this Academy, nine times out of 10 you...already hold...yourself to a certain standard.”*  
– **Freshman, Male**

*“I think giving everybody more training is going to waste everybody’s time. Because we know what’s right.”* – **Freshman, Male**

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Some Cadets said that they think sexual assault and sexual harassment happens so infrequently it is not worth having so many trainings. These cadets indicated that they believe the trainings do not apply to them because they are extremely unlikely to be impacted by sexual assault or sexual harassment, so they do not pay close attention.

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*“I think there’s a lot of [the attitude], ‘I’m never going to be a part of sexual assault or I’m never going to get sexually assaulted...it just doesn’t happen to me.’ That’s the mentality of [being] invincible.” – Upperclassman, Male*

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**Training Fatigue.** Some cadets and staff reported they experience training fatigue because of the oversaturation of trainings at the Academy, particularly those on sexual assault and sexual harassment. Many cadets said these trainings feel redundant, as each new training has similar content to the one before. As a result, cadets become numb to the topic and stop listening; frequent training can even have the unintended effect of creating a negative connotation around sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and making cadets less receptive to these issues. They suggested the same information could be provided in fewer and more meaningful trainings.

*“We’ve had the same training now eight times, nine times. The first maybe one or two times I got the information and if it’s the same thing over and over and I don’t do it, why do I need to listen?” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“I mean there’s a degree of negativity that people respond to the training with. They feel that they’re being beaten to death with it.”*  
– Upperclassman, Male

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## **Faculty Training**

Faculty and staff at the Academy receive a number of trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment. A few of the trainings are Coast Guard/Academy-wide trainings both the faculty and cadets are required to complete. Additionally, there are a couple of trainings only faculty and staff receive that focus on interacting with cadets regarding these issues. Victim advocates receive more training that is specifically focused on reporting and their role in supporting cadets who have been victimized.

**General Effectiveness.** Faculty and staff at the Academy were asked about their perception of the effectiveness of staff-focused trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment. Responses were mixed, but staff and faculty members generally feel that their trainings need improvement and they would like more training and guidance on how to have conversations with cadets about sexual assault and sexual harassment. Faculty do not feel sufficiently equipped to deal with sexual assault and sexual harassment issues with their students. They would like to feel more empowered to deal with issues as they come up, to know what to say, and to whom they can refer cadets. Some faculty members expressed frustration at feeling limited in terms of what they can talk to students about and they would like more freedom to talk about issues as they come up. Several faculty expressed interest in becoming victim advocates and feel it is important the Academy invests in better support for faculty. Staff and faculty reported getting the most out of trainings that include discussions and relevant real-world scenarios. They also said that they think it might be helpful to have some small group combined faculty–cadet trainings to foster discussion and to gain better insight into what issues related to sexual assault and sexual harassment are important to cadets. Similarly, they suggested opening a regular dialogue with representatives in CASA, so faculty can stay in tune with what is going on at the cadet level.

*“There’s this indecision...I have this cadet sitting in my office, I’m a civilian or I’m out of uniform or we’re at my house...they’re telling me this in confidence, what do I do.” – Faculty, Female*

*“[I would suggest] having candid conversations with the cadets more...CASA talks to cadets but they don’t talk to us, so I don’t know what they go through. I don’t know what they hear. Maybe for us getting more information from them...might be good for us internally.” – Faculty, Male*

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## Training Opportunities

Cadets and faculty members were asked for their feedback on techniques to improve sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings at the Academy. They suggested some revisions to the content and format of trainings to increase their relevance and effectiveness.

### Content

Cadets and faculty members made some recommendations to make sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings more impactful. These were the addition of more real-life scenarios, greater emphasis on bystander intervention, focus on healthy relationships, discussion of gender equality and women in the Coast Guard, and the impact of alcohol on sexual assault and sexual harassment.

**Scenarios and Real-Life Stories.** Students and faculty at the Academy suggested trainings can be improved by incorporating real stories from the Academy or Coast Guard and/or relevant scenarios that cadets might encounter in order to make them more personal, meaningful, and impactful. Cadets said including more “real world” situations would make them more likely to retain the information from the trainings and feel more prepared when faced with similar situations in their day-to-day lives.

*“You’re never going to get training from a computer simulation on how to deal with [it] emotionally, mentally, and physically if your best friend comes up to you and she’s crying and saying she’s been sexually assaulted.”*  
– **Sophomore, Male**

*“I attended a...SAPR course. It was fantastic...They provided two case studies of things that happened five years ago in the Coast Guard on the cutters and situations and it showed step by step what happened in the error chain, where people could have intervened at some point. That’s the kind of training that the cadets want to see.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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Likewise, by hearing real case studies of sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy or the Coast Guard at large, cadets said they would experience more of a connection to the subject matter and would find the trainings more engaging and meaningful. Cadets consistently said the most useful trainings they have had involved discussion of real incidents and role playing of possible situations, particularly those that contain some gray area in terms of interpretation.

*“I mean yeah, sexual harassment/sexual assault, it’s always discussed here...we never really see the realities of it or hear about those [cases] ...seeing the reality of it would definitely strike a chord.”*

– **Upperclassman, Male**

*“A PowerPoint training, ‘Hey, this is the policy,’ is not that effective. The most effective trainings I think have actually been the debriefs, hearing about other cases.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

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**Emphasis on Bystander Intervention.** As discussed in prior sections, the cultural paradigm at the Academy stresses personal responsibility and watching out for one another; as a result, cadets and faculty said that student self-policing/bystander reporting is common and may be a key to preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment. Cadets argued that trainings may be unlikely to prevent sexual assault and sexual harassment for those who would be likely to perpetrate an offense; however, bystanders could have an important role in intervening in at-risk situations to prevent events from escalating. Therefore, cadets suggested further emphasizing bystander intervention in sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings. They said some of these trainings exist, but it is essential they include role-playing scenarios that illustrate relevant situations and detailed instructions for when and how to step in. Many cadets maintained they already know sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention are important but are looking for tangible ways to protect their fellow cadets.

*“If we go to training and just one person...takes away from it and really grasps it and ends up preventing a situation, like one in a million, I would say that’s worth it like for that one person you were able to help in one situation.”* – **Sophomore, Male**

*“The two times that I know of when someone witnessed something, neither one intervened and stopped the attack. One after the fact got the person help...In at least one case it was due to physical fear—the bystander didn’t know how to act in the moment.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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**Healthy Relationships.** Faculty and cadets recommended offering training at the Academy on healthy relationships that could incorporate content on sexual assault and sexual harassment. They suggested having frank small-group discussions about what it means to have a romantic relationship at the Academy and how to navigate common issues and challenges that arise as a result of the Academy culture. Other key topics important to any relationship, such as communication and respect, should be covered as well. An in-depth examination of sexual assault and sexual harassment can then occur in relation to the unique context of romantic relationships—such a review would include issues around consent, tools for recognizing warning signs and supporting fellow cadets, and guidance for how to get help if you are the one in the relationship.

*“I think that’s something that as the Coast Guard we don’t focus at all, definitely not at the Academy: What is a healthy relationship and what are the things that are outside the boundaries of a healthy relationship and how*

*could they lead to or fall into the category of sexual harassment [or assault?]*” – **Faculty, Male**

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**Gender Equality and Women in the Service.** Cadets and faculty members suggested revising existing trainings or adding supplementary trainings encompassing the topics of respect for fellow cadets, gender equality, and women in the Coast Guard could improve the effectiveness of sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings at the Academy. Cadets reported that they feel a larger conversation on respect and gender equality could help to contextualize and add meaning to trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment. Further, discussions of sexism and other concerns that women in the service have at large might help to personalize these issues and provide a better understanding of how they contribute to perpetuating sexual assault and sexual harassment.

*“I feel [the] command focuses very heavily on [the] sexual assault aspect...but sometimes more important than [that] is talking about the difficult gender equality issues that a lot of women actually care more about. Like for example, maternity leave and having children and being in the Coast Guard.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

*“We had a training last year [where] they talked—not about sexual assault—but about sexism at the Academy. And that...was more of a discussion; people were talking about specific instances [including] institutional sexism...that was more useful because people brought up things that you don’t necessarily think about.”* – **Upperclassman, Female**

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**Responsible Use of Alcohol.** As discussed, alcohol was a topic brought up by cadets and faculty on multiple occasions and was consistently said to be relevant to sexual assault and sexual harassment, both in terms of increasing risk and also as a barrier to intervening and reporting. Faculty and students recommended providing better learning opportunities for responsible use of alcohol and more effectively integrating training on alcohol and sexual assault and sexual harassment. They said that they feel there are not enough supervised opportunities for cadets to learn their limits and understand how alcohol impacts them. They suggested having “training sessions” in an informal social setting with higher rank peers rather than officers; these trainings would be more relatable to their everyday lives and more likely to have a strong impact on behavior. They said alcohol training should also incorporate role playing around alcohol as it relates to sexual assault and sexual harassment, including topics of consent, recognizing at-risk situations, and having a safety plan, so cadets are better prepared when alcohol is involved. Finally, faculty and cadets said it is important that alcohol training emphasizes cadets’ close bonds and responsibility for watching out for one another.

*“At college, where else can you get drunk and you can learn the repercussions by failing a test rather than failing at life. And we don’t have that opportunity here. They don’t have that safe social space to learn in a lower stakes environment. They don’t have the place where they can learn whether or not they can handle alcohol.”* – **Faculty, Female**

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## **Format**

Cadets and faculty members made some recommendations for the format and administration of the sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings to make them more effective; these suggestions included having smaller group discussions and adding additional survivor and cadet-led trainings.

**Small Groups and Discussions.** Cadets and faculty members suggested incorporating smaller trainings that include discussion opportunities to maximize learning. They also said certain trainings could start larger and then be broken into smaller sessions as the topic necessitates and to facilitate role playing when appropriate. These smaller, interactive trainings could have greater impact because cadets are better able to fully engage and bring up issues that are personal and relevant for them. Some cadets expressed that there are certain topics they might feel more comfortable talking about in a same-gender setting—smaller trainings allow for this type of individualization.

*“[Leadership] should find more ways of doing that, change it up from the online training, change it up from some of the videos, make it more interactive.” – Faculty, Male*

*“[If you] split it up, have the girls in one section and have the guys in another section...I think it would be more effective because you are having...the opportunity for people to ask real questions and get real answers...I think guys and girls would be more honest with themselves and with each other when the opposite sex isn't in the room.”  
– Freshman, Female*

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**Speaker Type.** Cadets and faculty were asked what type of training leader or facilitator would be most effective for the sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings. They suggested bringing in survivors of sexual assault to talk about their experiences. Cadets said in the past when they heard survivors speak, they were more engaged and that the stories they heard have stuck with them. They maintained these personal stories make the issue of sexual assault more real and relevant for them in their day-to-day lives. Cadets contended that although any survivor stories are impactful, professional speakers are typically good at connecting with an audience; likewise, those speakers who graduated from the Academy or are in the Coast Guard have stories that hit especially close to home.

*“If the Academy were to bring somebody in—there's professional speakers that talk about...[sexual assault] and how it's affected their lives—if they were to bring in that kind of thing, I think that would hit home. Here's a real person talking about what happened to them.” – Upperclassman, Male*

*“One thing [leadership] could bring in is [speakers who] have personal experiences [with sexual assault], especially in the Coast Guard specifically. That could be a big help.” – Sophomore, Male*

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As discussed previously, cadets consider fellow cadets to be most influential when it comes to role modeling and impact on attitudes and day-to-day behavior. They trust, listen to, admire, and relate to their peers, above all others, particularly those senior to them. Unsurprisingly then, cadets also consistently mentioned fellow cadets as effective speakers and facilitators when it comes to administering sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings. Further, cadets maintained that fellow cadets who administer trainings are more likely to use the time wisely because they understand how busy their fellow cadets are, making the trainings more efficient. Cadets suggested the trainings and messaging about sexual assault and sexual harassment from fellow cadets should be used more frequently to maximize impact. Likewise, they argued cadets, particularly those in CASA, should have the opportunity to consult on and help design new trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment to ensure cadet feedback is integrated.

*“I think you’re more likely to have your...personal thoughts and opinions changed by your peers and classmates...more so than just some computer screen telling you that you shouldn’t do this.” – Upperclassman, Female*

*“I think the cadets [are effective] because [it’s] someone you relate to...who will be telling you something [so] it sounds like it matters more than someone whose job is to tell you about it.” – Upperclassman, Female*

## Discussion

This section will focus on the key takeaways from the focus groups on sexual assault and sexual harassment at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy that occurred between March 13 and March 17, 2017, will identify opportunities for increased awareness and prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment, and will present topic areas and research questions for further focus.

## Summary

USCGA is unique in that it is the smallest of the MSAs and has an extremely close-knit community of cadets. The Academy culture emphasizes a high moral standard based on accountability, personal responsibility, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Cadets and faculty indicated that they feel that leadership in the Coast Guard and at the Academy make education and prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment a top priority and are clear in their messaging that these events will not be tolerated. The structure of the Academy allows for sophomore, junior, and senior cadets to serve in leadership roles on campus, helping to mentor and act as role models for their fellow cadets. There are many others at the Academy who serve in a leadership capacity, from officers, to faculty/staff, and Academy leadership. Cadets say that other cadets are particularly influential on their day-to-day behaviors and attitudes.

The small size of the Academy and the focus on bonds among cadets leads to close friendships, including those that cross gender lines. Cadets indicated that they have mixed attitudes regarding gender equality and the role of women in the Coast Guard—some said that they do not see any sexism occurring on campus; others said they have experienced it but were afraid to speak up. Romantic relationships too are common, although the restrictions around these relationships can make them difficult to sustain.



Communication among cadets at the Academy takes place through word of mouth (i.e., talk, e-mail, texts) or social media applications like Facebook and Instagram. Cadets said that word spreads quickly at the Academy because most people know (or know of) each other. Because of restrictions and expectations around social media use at the Academy, many cadets have a public facing social media image as well as a more private one.

Cadets and faculty members said that alcohol plays a large role for cadets at the Academy—although there are strict policies in place for alcohol use, binge drinking is a problem. In fact, they agreed that the severe restrictions on alcohol use may serve to magnify the problem. Cadets are more likely to drink in excess while off campus and during weekends, because alcohol is not allowed on campus and cadets are limited in terms of the days they can drink. They also said there are few, if any, opportunities at the Academy for students to learn responsible drinking habits.

Cadets expressed confusion regarding the definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment and they commonly conflate the two. Both faculty and cadets reported that there has been an increase in focus on sexual assault and sexual harassment awareness, education, and prevention at the Academy; however, some say that more can be done. There is a perception among some cadets that sexual assault and sexual harassment are not a problem at the Academy, partly because they do not hear about many cases and because they feel cadets hold themselves to a high standard that would prevent these incidents from occurring. Further, there is a perception that sexual harassment is less important and occurs even less frequently than sexual assault; again, cadets say they almost never hear about cases and cadets are likely to self-police and take care of any so-called “minor” issues among themselves.

Because of the Academy’s culture of accountability and loyalty, bystander intervention is viewed as a means of prevention of sexual assault and sexual harassment. However, there are situations that can make a bystander wary of acting, including when alcohol is involved, if an incident occurs off campus, or if an incident is occurring between people in a romantic relationship. Some of this reticence centers around the issue of consent, since alcohol and existing relationships can create a gray area in interpreting these situations. The topic of alcohol was a consistent theme in discussions with cadets and staff about sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both groups agreed that these incidents are much more likely to occur when alcohol is involved and that training on sexual assault and sexual harassment should focus on how to handle some of the less clear-cut situations that arise when cadets have been drinking.

Cadets said that they are familiar with the options for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. Cadets were mixed when asked if they feel comfortable reporting. Cadets said certain factors are more likely to make them report, such as the “seriousness” of the incident or if it causes physical harm. Both staff and cadets said that male cadets are less likely to report because of the perceived stigma and might only report if they require medical care. Cadets and faculty said many resources are available for reporting, although it would be useful to have more faculty and students trained as victim advocates who can take restricted reports. They consistently praised CASA, the student-led sexual assault victim advocacy group as being a great resource for education and support for sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Cadets and staff discussed several barriers that they say can prevent cadets from reporting as a victim or bystander; these include fear of punishment or getting others in trouble for prohibited behaviors, fear of retaliation, either through impact to their reputation or social ostracism, and aversion to going through the reporting process. Barriers specific to sexual harassment are lack of clarity on what constitutes harassment and a perception that sexual harassment is minor and should be handled at the cadet-to-cadet level.

Cadets and faculty agreed that retaliation for reporting occurs but have mixed feelings on the frequency and methods (i.e., in person or social media) that are used. They agreed that when retaliation occurs, it is social in nature (i.e., damage to reputation or ostracism) rather than career-based retaliation. They also agreed that social-based retaliation is difficult to track and punish because it tends to be covert and subtle.

Cadets and staff at the Academy said that there is a large focus on providing trainings and other educational opportunities aimed at preventing sexual assault and sexual harassment. They reported that many of these trainings are effective; however, some improvement could be made to increase their impact. There is a perception among many on campus that the number of trainings for cadets aimed at sexual assault and sexual harassment is too high, leading to training fatigue; likewise, the large number of similar trainings can feel redundant and irrelevant. Cadets suggested both content and format changes for their trainings. Among their recommendations were the additions of real-life stories from the Academy/Coast Guard and small-group discussions. More detail on training-related and other opportunities that were discussed by cadets and faculty at the Academy is provided in the sections below.

## **Opportunities**

Cadets and faculty discussed various opportunities to improve sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings, to increase awareness and reporting of these events, and to prevent new incidents.

### ***Training Opportunities***

Cadets suggested key changes to the content of their trainings on sexual assault and sexual harassment. First, they requested that trainings include real stories/case studies from the Academy or Coast Guard in addition to relevant scenarios that illustrate real-world incidents and increase their preparedness in situations they may encounter. They also asked for greater emphasis on the role of the bystander in preventing and reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment and more guidance on how to recognize risky situations, particularly those that may be difficult to interpret. Both cadets and staff suggested offering trainings that incorporate information on various tools for healthy relationships; similarly, they suggested information/discussion sessions on gender equality, sexism, and women in the Service could be beneficial to help cadets view issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment in a larger context. Finally, they offered that there should be opportunities for learning responsible alcohol use because of the large role alcohol plays in sexual assault and sexual harassment; likewise, sexual assault trainings should emphasize how alcohol can muddy the waters when it comes to issues like consent.

Cadets also suggested changes to the format and administration of the sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings. They requested that most trainings be in person and consist of small-group interaction/role-playing in which greater discussion and participation can take place. They further suggested that as much as possible trainings should be led by upperclassmen at the Academy or CASA members, since they have a good deal of influence over attitudes of fellow cadets. Lastly, they said they want to have more outside speakers come to tell their personal survival stories because these stories, particularly those told by those in the Coast Guard and former cadets, are especially impactful and can foster larger discussions.

Faculty members suggested that their trainings could be improved by including more guidance on how to talk to cadets about sexual assault and sexual harassment; likewise, they desire more interaction with student victim advocates in order to gain a better understanding of the related issues that cadets grapple with on a day-to-day basis.

Both staff and cadets suggested that cadets should be more empowered by being able to influence design and content of their trainings. Likewise having more CASA members trained as victim advocates would allow greater flexibility around reporting. Allowing opportunities for interaction between cadets and staff during or after trainings could increase mutual understanding and comfort discussing sexual assault and sexual harassment and related issues.

Some other training suggestions that arose during discussions with cadets and faculty members included revising existing trainings to focus on reducing stereotypes and myths about victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment (including victim-blaming and false reporting); providing clearer definitions and real-world examples of sexual assault and sexual harassment to better educate cadets; and incorporating discussions on identified gray areas, such as interpretations of sexual harassment and consent, and complications posed by alcohol and existing romantic relationships.

### ***General Opportunities***

***Leadership Communication.*** Both cadets and faculty at the Academy stated that communication between Academy/USCG leadership and students/faculty about sexual assault and sexual harassment could be improved. They suggested that important e-mail communications should go to their “.edu” addresses to ensure receipt. Likewise, they requested that they receive relevant information about adjudicated sexual assault and sexual harassment cases at the Academy and survey/focus group results in a timely manner. These changes would help foster an atmosphere of transparency, would increase opportunities to discuss real-world events, and would increase dialogue about sexual assault and sexual harassment and related issues.

***Reporting.*** Faculty members and cadets urged that there should be greater flexibility around reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment. They said that the current policies dictating what steps are required for a restricted versus unrestricted report can cause confusion and may be a deterrent to reporting. Likewise, the lengthy process and lack of privacy associated with unrestricted reporting make it unlikely that cadets will pursue a formal investigation, meaning that oftentimes the assailant does not get punished. Having additional staff and cadets who are properly trained and authorized to take reports could also facilitate more reporting. Finally,

cadets and staff argued that reducing or eliminating punishment for cadets who report or are questioned for a report and had engaged in a prohibited behavior at the time of the event could significantly increase the number of reports filed for sexual assault and sexual harassment.

***Culture.*** Cadets and faculty at the Academy discussed several culture-based factors that if changed, could favorably impact sexual assault and sexual harassment education, reporting, and prevention efforts.

First, they reported, on several occasions throughout the discussions, that restrictions on alcohol use appear to contribute to overdrinking, particularly on weekends and off campus. They also said that alcohol use seems to be associated with greater prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Likewise, cadets said that they are less likely to report or step in to prevent these events when alcohol is present or when they are concerned about being punished for an alcohol or fraternization infraction. Since there appears to be a connection between some of the policies and penalties for alcohol use/fraternization and the incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment events and reporting, there may be benefits to examining these policies and considering modifications in the future.

A second cultural factor that was discussed as being relevant to reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment offenses was the messaging that cadets receive (some conscious, other unconscious) regarding handling issues like sexual harassment. A number of faculty members and cadets stated that cadets are strongly encouraged to handle so-called “less severe” incidents and issues that come up on a cadet-to-cadet level rather than bringing them up the chain of command unnecessarily. Although this policy makes sense for a lot of situations—including some cases of sexual harassment in which a cadet is able to talk with a fellow cadet to stop the unwanted behavior—the policy could have the unintended effect of discouraging cadets to report a situation that is “only” sexual harassment because they do not want to be perceived as weak or a troublemaker. It could also inadvertently make cadets believe that sexual harassment cases are less important or do not deserve an equal response to cases of sexual assault. Subtle shifts in the way that leadership, staff, and upperclassmen message sexual harassment at the Academy could prove beneficial in allowing cadets to feel comfortable coming forward to report.

### **Areas of Focus for Future Surveys/Focus Groups**

Based on the content of discussions with cadets and faculty at the Academy, a few patterns emerged in terms of topics that were brought up on numerous occasions and in several contexts. These themes are discussed below.

#### ***Academy Influencers***

Cadets talked at length about how fellow cadets, especially those in the classes above them, are most influential compared to other civilian/military leaders they encounter at the Academy. They said that although other leaders affect policy and general culture at the Academy, cadet leaders have the greatest bearing on day-to-day behaviors and attitudes and, in turn, have the most influence on how cadets perceive sexual assault and sexual harassment. This is the reason that CASA is so well liked and effective and why cadets say that trainings led by fellow cadets are most impactful. A number of the opportunities listed in the sections above incorporate cadets

in some way and with good reason. The topic of Academy influencers is one that should continue to be explored in relation to sexual assault and sexual harassment education, reporting, and prevention. The various ways that Academy influencers can be used and empowered to have maximum impact is not yet fully understood.

### ***Gender Relations***

The topic of gender relations is one that is intrinsically related to sexual assault and sexual harassment. Research on the continuum of harm suggests language choice, off-hand statements, jokes, and unconscious attitudes or biases have an impact on culture and can impact the likelihood of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Cadets and faculty raised the importance of focusing on the larger topic of gender relations a number of times throughout the focus groups because it fosters a discussion of underlying issues that when not addressed, can make it more difficult to decrease incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Cadets and faculty asserted that these discussions help provide context and greater insight into sexual assault and sexual harassment trainings. Further, they can personalize the issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment as they increase cadets' awareness of how their behavior, even on a seemingly small scale, can have tangible impact. Conversation about sexual assault and sexual harassment, therefore, might benefit from the inclusion of gender relations more broadly and related topics of sexism, respect, and women in the Academy/Military Services. Future focus groups and surveys should delve further into these issues to better determine what underlying attitudes and behaviors may exist that contribute to the occurrence of sexual harassment and violence.

### ***Sexual Harassment***

Sexual harassment is a topic that can benefit from increased coverage in future focus groups and surveys at the Academy because there seems to be a good deal of uncertainty and mixed feelings about sexual harassment in addition to reticence about reporting. Discussions with cadets and faculty raise various possibilities as to why sexual harassment is misunderstood, seen as less important, and underreported; however, further research is needed to obtain additional insight into these patterns. Furthermore, future focus groups and surveys can be used to evaluate the impact of any changes to messaging and training for sexual harassment that have been implemented in the preceding year.

### ***Bystander Intervention***

The subject of bystander intervention is one that has already been a large focus at the Academy. It is a concept that fits nicely with the Academy's cultural emphasis on loyalty, accountability, personal responsibility, and protecting one another. It also encourages the cadets to stay vigilant and empowers them to take action to help fellow cadets and to reduce the incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment. Both cadets and faculty like the idea of prevention built on unity and a familial bond, and they even argue that bystander intervention may be more effective at reducing sexual assault and sexual harassment than any other Academy training or resource. Because of the excitement with which cadets and faculty talked about this topics and their suggestion that trainings emphasize it even more, it is a topic that should be investigated further. Specifically, more research is needed to better understand the mechanisms at work that impact whether or not someone will intervene in an at-risk scenario—for example, is it more likely that

cadets will not recognize a situation that has the potential to escalate, do they feel unprepared to intervene, or are they concerned about potential consequences of intervening? By understanding these mechanisms, policies and educational opportunities can be most effectively targeted.

### ***Alcohol***

As discussed in several subsections of this appendix, alcohol was a central theme throughout the focus groups at the Academy. Alcohol was mentioned when talking about the general culture at the Academy, the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment, the obstacles to bystander intervention, the contributing factors to difficulty determining consent, the barriers to reporting, and training/other opportunities. Clearly, alcohol is an important topic to consider when discussing sexual assault and sexual harassment. It is recommended that alcohol use/misuse continues to be a key topic in future focus groups and surveys at the Academy in order to further an understanding of the culture around alcohol at the Academy and the role it plays in sexual assault and sexual harassment.

### ***Romantic Relationships***

The topic of romantic relationships is another that is important because it is an environmental element that has the ability to impact the way sexual assault and sexual harassment are reported, while also contributing to prevention if cadets are taught about respect, consent, and communication within a healthy relationship. Likewise, similar to alcohol, romantic relationships can create confusion in the way that sexual assault and sexual harassment are interpreted and consent is determined. Cadets and faculty agreed there are training, messaging, and cultural shifts around this topic that if implemented, could have a large impact on sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Academy. Additional research on this topic is needed in order to better understand the prevalence and characteristics of romantic relationships at the Academy and to provide insights that can inform education efforts.

### ***Treatment of the Accused***

The treatment of the accused is the final topic that is suggested as an area of focus for future research efforts. It is one topic, in contrast to the others listed here, that was not discussed in depth. However, it is vital to look into because it relates to other topics that were explored, including retaliation for reporting, victim-blaming, false reporting, and fear of getting a fellow cadet in trouble or ruining their career by reporting them. There appears to be a common belief that if cadets (usually male) are accused of sexual assault or sexual harassment, they are assumed to be guilty and their lives and careers are ruined, even if they are not found guilty. Another related line of questioning involves treatment of the cadet reporting and the accused when the reporting cadet is a male. Some cadets (both male and female) said that they feel there is an inherent bias toward female accusers; others reported that male cadets may be less likely to report because they worry they will not get equal treatment. Such issues are important to explore further to ensure that the system for reporting and adjudication (and perceptions thereof) is equitable across situations.

## **Appendix B. Glossary**





## Glossary

**Table 5.**  
*Glossary of Terms*

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition/Explanation</b>
2 Degree	Third year/junior (USAFA)
AD	Athletics department
AI	Additional instruction
AOC	Air Officer Commanding. Oversees all cadet activities, provides instruction, and serves as a role model to cadets (USAFA).
AMT	Academy Military Trainer. Similar to an AOC except, as an NCO, serves as an enlisted role model and ambassador (USAFA).
CASA	Cadets against Sexual Assault (Coast Guard)
CASHA	Cadets against Sexual Harassment and Assault (Army)
CO	Commanding Officer. The officer in command of a military unit. At an Academy, the CO is the Superintendent (the equivalent of a civilian college president).
COM	Commandant. At an Academy, the second in command.
Cow	Third year/junior (USMA)
ECA	Extracurricular activity
First class	Fourth year/senior
Firstie	Fourth year/senior
Fourth class	First year/freshman
IC	Intercollegiate athlete
JO	Junior (commissioned) officer
Jodel	Social media app that allows users to post comments anonymously and is popular with Service Academy students.
Mast	Non-judicial punishment for a minor offense. (Navy, Coast Guard)
MSA	Military Service Academy. Umbrella term referring to the U.S. Military Academy (USMA), U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), and U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). These are also sometimes referred to as “Service Academies” or “military academies.”
MO	Movement order. Grants permission to travel for training, extracurricular activity, or other event.
MPA	Military performance average. Similar to a grade point average at a traditional college or university.
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
OSI	Office of Special Investigations (Air Force)
PEER	Personal ethics and education representative. A cadet who helps to address concerns of other cadets in their squadron relating to stress, relationships, eating disorders, equal opportunity, and treatment. Associated with the PPC (USAFA).
PFT	Physical fitness test
Plebe	First year/freshman (USMA, USNA)
PME	Professional military education. The professional training, development, and schooling of military personnel. Includes but is not limited to MSAs.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition/Explanation</b>
SARC	Sexual Assault Response Coordinator. Individuals who assist victims of sexual assault (Army, Navy, and Air Force).
SAPR	Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. Programs, policy, and research designed to prevent and respond to sexual assault in the military (Army, Navy, and Air Force).
SAPRO	Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. Responsible for oversight of the DoD's sexual assault policy (Army, Navy, and Air Force).
Second class	Third year/junior
SEL	Senior enlisted leader
SHAPE	Sexual Harassment and Assault Prevention Education. Training and education program for midshipmen focused on sexual harassment and sexual assault awareness and bystander intervention skills (Navy).
SHARP	Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention. A program aimed at eliminating sexual harassment and assault (Army).
Swab summer	Summer program for incoming cadets (USCGA)
TAC	Tactical officer. A company commander (USMA).
Third class	Second year/sophomore
USAFA	United States Air Force Academy
USCC	United States Corps of Cadets. USMA student body (USMA)
USMA	United States Military Academy (also referred to as "West Point")
USNA	United States Naval Academy
USCGA	United States Coast Guard Academy
VA	Victim Advocate. Assists victims of sexual assault and is associated with SHARP (Army, Navy, Air Force).
The Yard	USNA grounds (USNA)
Yik Yak	Former social media app that allows users to post comments anonymously and was popular with Service Academy students.
Youngster	Second year/sophomore (USNA)
Yuk	Second year/sophomore (USMA)



**Appendix C.**  
**Student Focus Group Guide**



Student Guide

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## 2017 Student Focus Group Guide

### Part 1: Introduction to the Focus Group

Good morning/afternoon. I want to thank you for coming in to speak with me today. Before we get started I just want to cover some quick introductions and instructions. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am with the Office of People Analytics, also known as OPA. Until October of 2016, OPA was a part of the DMDC. My colleagues with me this morning/afternoon are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Today, we will be discussing topics covering gender-related issues, including sexual assault and harassment. This is a **voluntary focus group**. If you prefer not to sit in on this focus group, you are free to sit quietly while others participate or to leave at any time.

The information you provide today is a part of a larger ongoing congressionally required study that will help the Academy leadership, DoD and Congress to better understand gender-related issues here as well as at the other DoD Service Academies and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

Sometimes in discussions like this you might think to yourself "I have not experienced any of this, so why should I stay for this session?" I am here to say that is OK. It does not matter if you have or have not had a gender-related experience. Everyone's experiences and opinions are valuable, you are the expert on what it is like to attend the Academy and we want to hear your opinion about Academy life.

I ask that during today's discussion you **respect each other's opinions**. Everyone in this room may have different opinions on the topics we discuss today. We want to hear everyone's views. There are no right or wrong statements or opinions.

In the interest of time, we may need to move on from one topic to get to another area of interest.

I will lead the discussion and \_\_\_\_\_ will be helping us to take notes. We will record comments but will not record names or other identifying information. This will help us remember what was said here today, but not associate your personal information with our discussion.

This is a non-attribution session. To the extent permitted by law OPA does not publish or share anything outside this room that can be attributed to any one of you specifically. In some instances, OPA may receive requests for the unedited comments collected at these sessions; we ask your cooperation in protecting the privacy of the comments made within this session by not saying anything that would identify you or other participants. For example, do not state your name, your roommate's name, or your squadron or company identification. In addition, we also ask that you do not discuss the focus group proceedings after you leave. We have provided you with additional information about protecting your anonymity in your handout.

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

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## Part 2: Culture

To get us started I want to talk a little bit about the general culture on campus.

1. When you think about leadership on campus, who would you include?
2. Who on campus is most influential in shaping thoughts and behaviors?

*Socializing on Campus:*

1. What is the attitude toward socializing on campus? [from leadership, peers, etc.]
  - a. Are there a lot of friendships between men and women on campus?
    - i. Why or why not?
  - b. Is there discussion around women in service?
    - i. What do some of those discussions sound like?
    - ii. Do these discussions occur in person or on social media?

*Changes over time [for junior and senior focus groups]:*

1. Do you think this has changed over time?
  - a. How so?

*Culture:*

1. What is the general attitude among students about the focus on sexual assault? What about sexual harassment?
2. In your opinion, is sexual assault an important issue at the Academy?
  - a. Who is it important to? (i.e., students, Faculty, Senior Academy leaders, officers, athletic staff)
    - i. Probe on each group.
  - b. How do you know it is important or not important to a group?
3. What are Faculty saying about sexual harassment and sexual assault, if anything?
  - a. Senior Academy leaders?
  - b. Officers
    - i. COs, Faculty, Administrative, PE?
    - ii. Do they differ in their message or attitudes?
  - c. Civilians?
4. Who are the most influential individuals on campus to make a change in what people are saying about sexual assault and sexual harassment?

*Cadet/midshipman leadership with culture and climate:*

Thinking about your cadet/midshipman leadership...

1. How much would you say they "set the tone" for how things work around here?



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- a. Are they highly influential, somewhat influential, or a little bit influential?
  - b. Which groups or individuals have the most influence?
2. What about when it comes to sexual harassment and sexual assault, specifically?
    - a. Do you see your cadet/midshipman leadership talking about these issues?
      - i. If so, what messages are they sending?
      - ii. How effective are they at influencing attitudes and behaviors
      - iii. How important do these issues seem to cadet/midshipmen leadership?
    - b. What do you think their responsibilities are as leaders around issues of sexual harassment and unwanted sexual contact?

*Alcohol:*

1. In general, what role does alcohol play on campus?
  - a. How does alcohol culture differ between those that are of legal drinking age and those that are not of legal drinking age?
  - b. How do faculty and staff set the tone for alcohol consumption?
2. What are some guidelines, policies, and procedures encouraged by the Academy when socializing at events where alcohol is being served?
  - a. Are these guidelines typically followed by students?
    - i. Which guidelines are most effective?
  - b. How might these change when off campus, for example out on the town?
    - i. Are cadets/midshipmen more or less likely to follow policies and procedures off campus?
  - c. How does this differ among class year?
3. Why might someone look for events outside of campus sanctioned or sponsored activities?
  - a. How does alcohol play a role in that decision?
  - b. What could make official events more popular?
4. When you are socializing (with friends, with classmates), how often is alcohol involved?
  - a. When involved, how much alcohol is typically consumed?
    - i. How would you categorize that amount of drinking, light, moderate, excessive?
      - Why?
    - ii. At what point does it become binge drinking?
      - What does binge drinking mean to you?
      - What are some reasons someone might binge drink?
    - iii. What would consider an appropriate use of alcohol?
      - What about a misuse of alcohol?
      - How effective are programs aimed at stopping alcohol misuse? How could they be made more effective?
5. What role do you think alcohol plays in sexual assault?
  - a. For survivors?
  - b. For offenders?
  - c. For bystanders

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6. How do you think a situation involving sexual assault might differ here when people are drinking compared to when they are sober?
  - a. And what if one person is sober and the other has been drinking?
7. How can you tell if someone is too drunk to consent?
  - a. Is this a difficult determination to make?

*Social Media:*

1. In general, what role does social media play on campus?
  - a. What social media apps and websites are used on campus?
    - i. How does social media play a role in hooking-up?
      - What types of apps/websites are used for hooking-up?
      - How are they used to hook-up?
      - When seeing or hooking up with someone what role does text messaging play?
      - Is sexting expected?
2. What other types of socialization take place of social media?
  - a. How might social media be used in a negative way?
  - b. What types of conversations might take place over social media as opposed to in-person?

### Part 3: Perceptions about Perceived Sexual Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Contact

#### *General Discussion on Perceived Sexual Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Contact:*

1. Do you feel like you see or hear about sexual assaults occurring on campus?
  - a. What about sexual harassment?
2. How would you define "sexual assault"?
  - a. Does anyone have a different definition?
3. How would you define "unwanted sexual contact"?
  - a. In your mind is there a difference between unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault?
    - i. **If yes:** What is the difference?
    - ii. Would you react differently depending on if you perceived something to be unwanted sexual contact versus sexual assault?
  - b. Is unwanted sexual contact different for men and women?
    - i. How?
4. How would you define "sexual harassment"?
  - a. What types of behaviors fall under sexual harassment as opposed to sexual assault or unwanted sexual contact?
  - b. Is sexual harassment different for men and women?
    - i. How?
5. You may recall a survey conducted in the Spring of 2016 on gender related issues. I would like to share some results from that study with you. You can find them in your handout.
  - a. First let's turn to page 5 and look at the figure showing unwanted sexual contact rates for women and men.
    - i. When you first hear/see those numbers, what comes to mind? (surprise, too high, too low, about right?)
    - ii. [probe to reaction – why are you surprised/not surprised? What is happening (or not happening) at your Academy to make you feel this way?]
  - b. Now let's look at the number of incidents reported in 2015-2016 on page 6
    - i. When you first hear/see those numbers, what comes to mind? (surprise, too high, too low, about right?)
    - ii. [probe to reaction – why are you surprised/not surprised? What is happening (or not happening) at your Academy to make you feel this way?]
  - c. Now let's look at the number broken out by class on page 5.
    - i. When you first hear/see those numbers, what stands out?
    - ii. Why do you think rates increase after freshman year?
      - [For **sophomores, juniors and seniors**] What changes occurring sophomore and junior year lead to increased rates?
      - [For **seniors**] What types of things change in a seniors routine and experience compared to sophomores and juniors?

*Changes over time [for junior and senior focus groups]:*

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- d. Thinking about environmental changes for the different classes, what changes could lead to the different results by class?

*Bystander Intervention:*

1. What do you think most students would do if they observed a situation where a sexual assault was about to occur?
  - a. How would you know if a sexual assault was about to occur?
    - i. What does a high risk situation look like?
    - ii. When might alcohol be involved?
  - b. Do you think people would take action to prevent these situations?
  - c. What are some reasons that a cadet/midshipman might *not* take action in this situation?
    - i. When might you be unsure if a situation was about to lead to sexual assault or harassment?
    - ii. How might alcohol affect someone's decision to intervene?
  - d. Would someone's willingness to step in change depending on if they know the people involved? (i.e., the perceived offender or the perceived victim)

*Multiple experiences of sexual assault:*

1. If a victim were to experience multiple incidents of unwanted sexual contact, do you think these repeated incidents would be more likely to be from the same offender/perpetrator or different ones?
  - a. Why might multiple incidents come from the same offender?
    - i. How do you think an existing relationship might play a role in multiple incidents of unwanted sexual contact?
      - What type of existing relationships could play a role in repeat incidences? (i.e. casual friends, intimate partners, same company, both athletes, same extracurricular activity/club)
      - How does an existing relationship impact the perception of incidence of unwanted sexual contact?
2. Looking at survey results on page 6, we saw in 2016 that victims often indicated experiencing more than one incident of unwanted sexual contact. Why do you think this is?
  - a. Are perpetrators getting away with these behaviors because victims do not report it or perpetrators are not charged and punished?
  - b. Do you think behaviors tend to progress, such as experiences of touching first, followed by more aggressive behaviors?

*Factors Affecting Sexual Assault:*

1. Without discussing a specific incident, if you were talking to a new (cadet/midshipman), what advice would you give them about places or activities where they should be more cautious?
  - a. Any specific locations?
  - b. On campus or off campus?
  - c. How could these places be made safer?
2. Any specific events?
  - a. On an activity away from campus?
3. Do you think sexual assault and harassment is something that happens more among athletes?

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- a. Does leadership hold them to the same standards on these issues as other students?
- b. Do peers hold athletes to the same standards?
  - i. Why do you think standards might differ for athletes?

4. What would you tell someone to look for as an indicator of a threat?

***Changes over time (for junior and senior focus groups)***

1. Do you think sexual assault and harassment have become more or less of a problem since you arrived on campus?
  - a. What makes you say that?
  - b. What changes have you seen? (i.e., emphasis, attention from media)
    - i. How does this impact the culture at the Academy?
2. How often do you and your peers talk about sexual assault and harassment?
  - a. Is this more often, less often, or about the same as when you first got to campus?
3. How has attitudes changed in cadet/midshipman leadership related to sexual assault and harassment?
  - a. Is current cadet/midshipman leadership more or less strict in shutting down inappropriate behavior? What makes you say that?

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**Part 4: Reporting and Retaliation**

Now I would like to talk a bit about the reporting process...

*Reporting:*

1. What are the types of behaviors someone would report?
2. What are the types of behaviors someone would not report?
  - a. Are there certain behaviors that are not serious enough to report?
    - i. What types of behaviors are not serious enough to report?
3. What goes into reporting? How would someone report sexual harassment? What about reporting sexual assault?
  - a. What are all of the steps in reporting?
  - b. Who do you make a report to?
  - c. How much time do you think the reporting process would take?
4. What are some reasons why someone would report?
5. What are some reasons why someone would not report?
  - a. What types of situations might lead to a student who was sexually assaulted not reporting?
  - b. What might cause someone to think that an occurrence is "not important enough to report"
    - i. Can you give me an example of something that might not be considered "important enough to report"?
  - c. How might the involvement of alcohol affect someone's likelihood of reporting unwanted sexual contact?
    - i. Studies show the alcohol lowers inhibitions and often lead to sexual advances, if alcohol is involved when an unwanted sexual advance occurs, when is it report worthy?
      - How might the involvement of alcohol affect the "target" of unwanted sexual advances?
      - How might the involvement of alcohol affect the offender?
  - d. What parts of Academy culture might prevent someone from reporting?
    - i. What about non-academy culture?
    - ii. Do you think this differs here compared to other universities or colleges? How?
  - e. Do you think people know how to report?
  - f. Is there a fear of retaliation for reporting? (If needed, retaliation can take many forms including reprisal, ostracism, or maltreatment.)
6. Does Academy leadership talk about reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment?
  - a. At what level (senior leaders like the Superintendent and Commandant, officers/NCOs)?
  - b. Do your coaches and academic faculty talk about reporting?
  - c. How about cadet/midshipman leadership?
  - d. Anyone else [for example, counselors, SARCs]?
7. Does Academy leadership encourage reporting of sexual harassment?
  - a. **If yes:** How does the Academy encourage reporting?
  - b. **If no:** How does the Academy discourage reporting?
  - c. Is there a difference in attitude between leadership who are alumni and those that are not?

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8. Does the Academy leadership encourage reporting sexual assault?
  - a. **If yes:** How does the Academy encourage reporting?
  - b. **If no:** How does the Academy discourage reporting?
  - c. Is there a difference in attitude between leadership who are alumni and those that are not?
9. Do your peers encourage reporting?
  - a. **If yes:** How do your peers encourage reporting?
  - b. **If no:** What are some ways that peers discourage reporting?
  - c. Does cadet leadership encourage reporting?

*Retaliation:*

1. Do you think retaliation for reporting is an issue at your Academy?
  - a. What does retaliation look like?
  - b. How common is it?
  - c. Do you think people ever blame the victim?
    - i. How?
    - ii. Why?
2. When you think about potential acts of retaliation against people who have made a report of sexual assault, what does that look like?
  - a. What sorts of experiences might people have after they report?
    - i. Are people ostracized? How? (Definition on page x of handout)
    - ii. Are people treated differently? Do they experience maltreatment? How? (Definition on page x of handout)
    - iii. What would you consider "social retaliation"?
  - b. Would it look different depending on who reported? How?
3. What is the role of social media in retaliation against people who report a sexual assault?
  - a. Does retaliation that occurs on social media differ from retaliation that occurs in person or via other venues?
  - b. What types of social media does retaliation occur on?
    - i. Why these apps/websites?
4. Why do you think people retaliate after someone reports?
5. Thinking back to your experiences at the Academy, how have you seen others react when they see someone experiencing these negative actions after making a report of sexual assault?
6. The Department has been focusing on retaliation against people who report sexual assault and trying to identify ways to prevent these behaviors. Have you seen any of these efforts at your Academy (leadership, peers, etc.)? What has this looked like? What are some ways you have noticed an effort to minimize retaliation?
7. [If they have indicated that there has been an increased focus at their Academy] Do you think the recent focus on retaliation has changed how people think about what happens to survivors after they report?

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*Military Justice Process:*

1. Sometimes, situations arise where someone reports a sexual assault and an investigation occurs, but then the survivor decides not to proceed with the military justice process.
  - a. What are some reasons this might happen?
  - b. How do you think this affects others who might be thinking about reporting?



### Part 5: Training and Prevention

Thinking back to the trainings you received around sexual harassment and sexual assault:

1. How effective do you think the training you receive is for preventing or reducing sexual assault?
2. How effective do you think the training you receive is for preventing or reducing sexual harassment?
  - a. If effective, looking at the handout again, why do you think there was an increase in unwanted sexual contact from 2014 to 2016?
3. Do you think there is a difference between the trainings you like the most and the ones you find most effective? Can you elaborate on this?
4. What have you learned from these trainings?
  - a. What can you do to help prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault?
    - i. Are there any key skills you have learned from trainings?
5. Are there opportunities to improve training and education around sexual assault? How about sexual harassment?
  - a. What type of language would you use to talk about sexual harassment and sexual assault? (i.e., straight talk, euphemisms)
    - i. Why do you think this would be effective?
  - b. How effective are outside/guest speakers?
  - c. How might topics related to sexual assault and sexual harassment fit in a "life skills" class?
    - i. What other topics would you like to see covered that could have a positive change of reducing unwanted sexual assault?

*Changes over time [for junior and senior focus groups]:*

1. Has the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault training changed in any way from previous years? How?

*Preventing sexual assault:*

The Department and your Academy have taken many steps to prevent sexual assault.

1. Do students feel personally invested in preventing sexual assault and harassment?
  - a. What makes you say that?
  - b. What is the biggest challenge in preventing sexual assault?
2. Who are the most effective individuals to deliver sexual assault prevention messages?
3. Think for a minute about other prevention-related programs at the Academy such as smoking, drinking, suicide, etc. What about those programs do you see as particularly successful? Could those features be adapted to sexual assault prevention?
4. Do students feel they can discuss situations where they see someone at risk either with the person directly or with Academy officials [if asked, clarify that if a student sees a fellow student in a risky situation that they can speak up and warn the fellow student or alert an official.]

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- a. Are there any policies that the Academy could make or change to help intervene before unwanted sexual contact occurs?
5. Does your Academy seek input from students when they design or implement a new prevention program? Do you have any examples? How could the Academy use student input better?
6. Are you aware of any local community resources that help in preventing or responding to incidents of sexual assault? How are those resources publicized to the Academy?
7. Are there groups within the Academy where prevention is taken more or less seriously? [If asked, give examples of groups like sports teams, clubs, class years, squadrons, upperclassmen.]
8. What role can Academy leaders play in prevention?
  - a. What about Academic Instructors?
  - b. What role could the alumni play in sexual assault prevention?

*Changes over time [for junior and senior focus groups]:*

1. How much attention is paid to sexual assault and harassment now compared to when you first arrived on campus?
2. Why do you think this has changed?
3. Are there any specific events that made an impression on you with respect to your attitude about sexual assault? Any events that you have heard of?
4. How often does leadership speak with you about sexual assault and harassment?
  - a. Is this more often, less often, or about the same as when you first got to campus?
  - b. Probe on different types of leadership—cadet leadership, senior leadership, officers directly in charge of unit, coaches, etc.

**Part 6: Concluding Comments**

- We are just about ready to wrap up, but before we finish, are there any last comments you wanted to add to the discussion?
- Finally, what do you think the SAPR Program look like 5 years from now?

We want to thank you for your time today in this focus group session. As I mentioned at the beginning, we will treat all of your comments anonymously. There is no attribution to any of you for the specific comments you made today. Please also respect that non-attribution when you leave here today. Our goal is to provide the best data possible, and you have helped us greatly today with your comments and insights.

One last comment – on the last page of the participant handout you will see a list of resources available to you if you would like to follow up with us or have any questions. That is yours to keep. It also lists Academy resources if you would like to talk further to someone about this study or any experiences you might have had with unwanted gender-related behaviors.

Thank you again for your participation.



**Appendix D.**  
**Faculty Focus Group Guide**



Faculty Guide

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## 2017 Faculty Focus Group Guide

### Part 1: Introduction to the Focus Group

Good morning/afternoon. I want to thank you for coming in to speak with me today. Before we get started I just want to cover some quick introductions and instructions. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am with the Office of People Analytics, also known as OPA. Until October of 2016, OPA was a part of the DMDC. My colleagues with me this morning/afternoon are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Today, we will be discussing topics covering gender-related issues, including sexual assault and harassment. This is a **voluntary focus group**. If you prefer not to sit in on this focus group, you are free to sit quietly while others participate or to leave at any time.

The information you provide today is a part of a larger ongoing congressionally required study that will help Academy leadership, the DoD and Congress to better understand gender-related issues here as well as at the other DoD Service Academies and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

As members of the [faculty/staff/Academy leadership] who interact with the students you offer valuable insight on these important issues. We do not want to discuss any specific cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment. We do want to discuss issues in general so we can provide guidance to leadership to create the best environment possible for the students.

I ask that during today's discussion you **respect each other's opinions**. Everyone in this room may have different opinions on the topics we discuss today. We want to hear everyone's views. There are no right or wrong statements or opinions.

In the interest of time, we may need to move on from one topic to get to another area of interest.

I will lead the discussion and \_\_\_\_\_ will be helping us to take notes. We will record comments but will not record names or other identifying information. This will help us remember what was said here today, but not associate your personal information with our discussion.

This is a non-attribution session. To the extent permitted by law OPA does not publish or share anything outside this room that can be attributed to any one of you specifically. In some instances, OPA may receive requests for the unedited comments collected at these sessions; we ask your cooperation in protecting the privacy of the comments made within this session by not saying anything that would identify you or other participants. For example, do not state your name, your roommate's name, or your squadron or company identification. In addition, we also ask that you do not discuss the focus group proceedings after you leave. We have provided you with additional information about protecting your anonymity in your handout.

Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

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**Part 2: Culture**

To get us started I want to talk a little bit about the general culture on campus.

1. When you think about leadership on campus, who would you include? (i.e. faculty, students in leadership)

*Socializing on Campus:*

1. What is the attitude toward socializing on campus? [from leadership, peers, etc.]
  - a. Are there a lot of friendships between men and women on campus?
    - i. Why or why not?
  - b. Is there discussion around women in service?
    - i. What do some of those discussions sound like?
    - ii. Do these discussions occur in person or on social media?
  - a. Do you think this has changed over time?
    - i. How so?

*Culture:*

1. What is the general attitude among students about the focus on sexual assault? What about sexual harassment?
2. In your opinion, is sexual assault an important issue at the Academy?
  - a. Who is it important to? (i.e., students, Faculty, Senior Academy leaders, officers, athletic staff)
    - i. Probe on each group.
  - b. How do you know it is important or not important to a group?
  - c. Who are the most effective individuals to deliver sexual assault prevention messages?
  - d. Who on campus is most influential in shaping thoughts and behaviors?
3. What are Faculty saying about sexual harassment and sexual assault, if anything?
  - a. Senior Academy leaders?
  - b. Officers
    - i. COs, Faculty, Administrative, PE?
    - ii. Do they differ in their message or attitudes?
  - c. Civilians?

*Cadet/Midshipman leadership with culture and climate:*

Thinking about the cadet/midshipman leadership

1. How much would you say they "set the tone" for how things work around here?
  - a. Are they highly influential, somewhat influential, or a little bit influential?
  - b. Which groups or individuals influence?
2. What about when it comes to sexual harassment and sexual assault, specifically?
  - a. Do you see your cadet/midshipman leadership talking about these issues?
    - i. If so, what messages are they sending?



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- b. What do you think their responsibilities are as leaders around issues of sexual harassment and unwanted sexual contact?
  - i. How effective are they at influencing attitudes and behaviors
  - ii. How important do these issues seem to cadet/midshipmen leadership?

*Alcohol:*

1. In general, what role does alcohol play on campus?
  - a. How does alcohol culture differ between those that are of legal drinking age and those that are not of legal drinking age?
2. What are some guidelines, policies, and procedures encouraged by the Academy when socializing at events where alcohol is being served? Are these guidelines typically followed by students?
  - a. Which guidelines are most effective?
  - b. How might these change when off campus, for example out on the town?
    - i. Are cadets/midshipmen more or less likely to follow policies and procedures off campus?
  - c. How does this differ among class year?
  - d. Why might someone look for events outside of campus sanctioned or sponsored activities?
    - i. How does alcohol play a role in that decision?
    - ii. What could make official events more popular?
3. How do faculty and staff set the tone for alcohol consumption?
4. What role do you think alcohol plays in sexual assault?
  - a. For survivors?
  - b. For offenders?
  - c. For bystanders?
5. How do you think a situation involving sexual assault might differ when people are drinking compared to when they are sober?

*Social Media:*

1. In general, what role does social media play on campus?
  - a. What social media apps and websites are used on campus?
2. What types of socialization take place of social media?
  - a. How might social media be used in a negative way?
  - b. What types of conversations might take place over social media as opposed to in-person?

**Part 3: Perceptions about Perceived Sexual Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Contact***General Discussion on Perceived Sexual Harassment and Unwanted Sexual Contact:*

1. Do you feel like you see or hear about sexual assaults occurring on campus?
  - a. What about sexual harassment?
2. If you were to see behavior in your classroom, company, or office space that might qualify as sexual harassment, how would you respond?
  - a. Would you feel prepared to respond?
3. How would you define "sexual assault"?
  - a. Does anyone have a different definition?
4. How would you define "unwanted sexual contact"?
  - a. In your mind is there a difference between unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault?
    - i. **If yes:** What is the difference?
    - ii. Would you react differently depending on if you perceived something to be unwanted sexual contact versus sexual assault?
  - b. Is unwanted sexual contact different for men and women?
    - i. How?
5. How would you define "sexual harassment"?
  - a. What types of behaviors fall under sexual harassment as opposed to sexual assault or unwanted sexual contact?
  - b. Is sexual harassment different for men and women?
    - i. How?
6. A survey was conducted in the Spring of 2016 on gender related issues. I would like to share some results from that study with you. You can find them in your handout on page X.
  - a. First let's turn to page 5 and look at the figure showing unwanted sexual contact rates for women and men.
    - i. When you first hear/see those numbers, what comes to mind? (surprise, too high, too low, about right?)
    - ii. [probe to reaction – why are you surprised/not surprised? What is happening (or not happening) at your Academy to make you feel this way?]
  - b. Now let's look at the number of incidents reported in 2015-2016 on page 6 .
    - i. When you first hear/see those numbers, what comes to mind? (surprise, too high, too low, about right?)
    - ii. [probe to reaction – why are you surprised/not surprised? What is happening (or not happening) at your Academy to make you feel this way?]
  - c. Now let's look at the number broken out by class on page 5.
    - i. When you first hear/see those numbers, what stands out?
    - ii. Why do you think rates increase after freshman year?
    - iii. Thinking about environmental changes for the different classes, what changes could lead to the different results by class?

*Bystander Intervention:*

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1. What do you think most students would do if they observed a situation where a sexual assault was about to occur?
  - a. How would they know if a sexual assault was about to occur?
    - i. What does a high risk situation look like?
    - ii. When might alcohol be involved?
  - b. Do you think students would take action to prevent these situations?
  - c. What are some reasons that a cadet/midshipman might *not* take action in this situation?
    - i. When might a student be unsure if a situation was about to lead to sexual assault or harassment?
  - d. Would someone's willingness to step in change depending on if they know the people involved? (ie, the perceived offender or the perceived victim)

*Multiple experiences of sexual assault:*

1. If a victim were to experience multiple incidents of unwanted sexual contact, do you think these repeated incidents would be more likely to be from the same offender/perpetrator or different ones?
  - a. Why might multiple incidents come from the same offender?
    - i. How do you think an existing relationship might play a role in multiple incidents of unwanted sexual contact?
      - What type of existing relationships could play a role in repeat incidences? (i.e. casual friends, intimate partners, same company, both athletes, same extracurricular activity/club)
      - How does an existing relationship impact the perception of incidence of unwanted sexual contact?
2. Looking at survey results on page 6, we saw in 2016 that victims often indicated experiencing more than one incident of unwanted sexual contact. Why do you think this is?
  - a. Are perpetrators getting away with these behaviors because victims do not report it or perpetrators are not charged and punished?
  - b. Do you think behaviors tend to progress, such as experiences of touching first, followed by more aggressive behaviors?

*Factors Affecting Sexual Assault:*

1. Without discussing a specific incident, if you were talking to a cadet/midshipman, what advice would you give them about places or activities where they should be more cautious?
  - a. Any specific locations?
  - b. On campus or off campus?
  - d. How could these places be made safer?
2. Any specific events?
  - a. On an activity away from campus?
3. Do you think sexual assault and harassment is something that happens more among athletes?
  - a. Do peers hold athletes to the same standards?
    - i. Why do you think standards might differ for athletes?
4. What would you tell a cadet/midshipman to look for as an indicator of a threat?

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*Changes over time:*

1. Do you think sexual assault and harassment have become more or less of a problem since you arrived on campus?
  - a. What makes you say that?
  - b. What changes have you seen? (ie, emphasis, attention from media)
    - i. How does this impact the culture at the Academy?

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**Part 4: Reporting and Retaliation**

Now I would like to talk a bit about the reporting process...

*Reporting:*

1. If someone (student, faculty, staff) disclosed to you that they were sexually assaulted, how confident are you that you could respond appropriately?
  - a. How would you respond?
2. What are the types of behaviors someone would report?
3. What are the types of behaviors someone would not report?
  - a. Are there certain behaviors that are not serious enough to report?
    - i. What types of behaviors are not serious enough to report?
  - b. Do students know how to report a sexual assault or sexual harassment?
    - i. What makes you say that?
4. What are some reasons why someone would report?
5. What are some reasons why someone would not report?
  - a. What types of situations might lead to a student who was sexually assaulted not reporting?
  - b. What might cause someone to think that an occurrence is "not important enough to report"?
    - i. Can you give me an example of something that might not be considered "important enough to report"?
  - c. How might the involvement of alcohol affect a student's likelihood of reporting unwanted sexual contact?
  - d. What parts of Academy culture might prevent someone from reporting?
    - i. What about non-academy culture?
    - ii. Do you think this differs here compared to other universities or colleges? How?
  - e. Is there a fear of retaliation for reporting? (If needed, retaliation can take many forms including reprisal, ostracism, or maltreatment.)
6. Do students encourage their peers to report?
  - a. **If yes:** How do they encourage reporting?
  - b. **If no:** What are some ways that student peers discourage reporting?
  - c. Does cadet/midshipman leadership encourage reporting?
7. Does Academy leadership talk about reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment?
  - a. At what level (senior leaders like the Superintendent and Commandant, officers/NCOs)?
  - b. Do coaches and academic faculty talk about reporting?
  - c. Anyone else [for example, counselors, SARCs]?
8. Does Academy leadership encourage reporting of sexual harassment?
  - a. **If yes:** How does the Academy encourage reporting?
  - b. **If no:** How does the Academy discourage reporting?
  - c. Is there a difference in attitude between leadership who are alumni and those that are not?
9. Does the Academy leadership encourage reporting sexual assault?
  - a. **If yes:** How does the Academy encourage reporting?
  - b. **If no:** How does the Academy discourage reporting?

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- c. Is there a difference in attitude between leadership who are alumni and those that are not?

*Retaliation:*

1. Do you think retaliation for reporting is an issue at your Academy?
  - a. What does retaliation look like?
    - i. Who is retaliating?
  - b. How common is it?
  - c. Do you think people ever blame the victim?
    - i. How?
    - ii. Why?
2. When you think about potential acts of retaliation against people who have made a report of sexual assault, what does that look like?
  - a. What sorts of experiences might people have after they report?
    - i. Are people ostracized? How? (Definition on page x of handout)
    - ii. Are people treated differently? Do they experience maltreatment? How? (Definition on page x of handout)
    - iii. What would you consider "social retaliation"?
  - b. Would it look different depending on who reported? How?
3. What is the role of social media in retaliation against people who report a sexual assault?
  - a. Does retaliation that occurs on social media differ from retaliation that occurs in person or via other venues?
  - b. What types of social media does retaliation occur on?
    - i. Why these apps/websites?
4. Why do you think people retaliate after someone reports?
5. Thinking back to your experiences at the Academy, how have you seen others react when they see someone experiencing these negative actions after making a report of sexual assault?
6. The Department has been focusing on retaliation against people who report sexual assault and trying to identify ways to prevent these behaviors. Have you seen any of these efforts at your Academy (leadership, peers, etc.)? What has this looked like? What are some ways you have noticed an effort to minimize retaliation?
7. [If they have indicated that there has been an increased focus at their Academy] Do you think the recent focus on retaliation has changed how people think about what happens to survivors after they report?

*Military Justice Process:*

1. Sometimes, situations arise where someone reports a sexual assault and an investigation occurs, but then the survivor decides not to proceed with the military justice process.
  - a. What are some reasons this might happen?
  - b. How do you think this affects others who might be thinking about reporting?

**Part 5: Training and Prevention**

Thinking about the training and prevention...

1. Tell me a little bit about the training students receive about sexual harassment and sexual assault?
2. How effective do you think the training students receive is for preventing or reducing sexual assault?
  - a. If effective, why do you think the numbers of unwanted sexual contact increased from 2014-2016?
3. What training do faculty/staff receive about sexual harassment and sexual assault? What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of that training?
4. How effective do you think the training faculty/staff receive is for preventing or reducing sexual assault among the midshipman?
5. Has the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault training changed in any way from previous years? How?
6. Are there opportunities to improve training and education around sexual assault? How about sexual harassment?
  - a. What type of language would you use to talk about sexual harassment and sexual assault? (ie, straight talk, euphemisms)
    - i. Why do you think this would be effective?
  - b. What sort of training would help you in the future?
  - c. How might topics related to sexual assault and sexual harassment fit in a "life skills" class?
    - i. What other topics would you like to see covered that could have a positive change of reducing unwanted sexual assault?
7. Do you feel you have the authority to make a difference in sexual harassment and sexual assault prevention? Why or why not? What is the greatest limitation?

*Preventing sexual assault:*

The Department and your Academy have taken many steps to prevent sexual assault.

1. What are some of the programs and resources here at your Academy that address sexual assault prevention? Please describe.
  - a. What makes these programs effective? What more could be done?
2. Think for a minute about other prevention-related programs at the Academy such as smoking, drinking, suicide, etc. What about those programs do you see as particularly successful? Could those features be adapted to sexual assault prevention?
3. Do students feel they can discuss situations where they see someone at risk either with the person directly or with Academy officials [if asked, clarify that if a student sees a fellow student in a risky situation that they can speak up and warn the fellow student or alert an official.]
  - a. Are there any policies that the Academy could make or change to intervene?

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4. Does your Academy seek input from students when they design or implement a new prevention program? Do you have any examples? How could the Academy use student input better?
5. Are you aware of any local community resources that help in preventing or responding to incidents of sexual assault? How are those resources publicized to the Academy?
6. Are there groups within the Academy where prevention is taken more or less seriously? [If asked, give examples of groups like sports teams, clubs, class years, squadrons, upperclassmen.]
7. What role can you play in prevention?
  - a. How can you be more effective?
    - i. What about Officers
    - ii. What role could the alumni play in sexual assault prevention?

*Changes over time:*

1. How much attention is paid to sexual assault and harassment now compared to when you first arrived on campus?
2. Why do you think this has changed?
3. Are there any specific events that made an impression on you with respect to your attitude about sexual assault? Any events that you have heard of?
4. How often does leadership speak with students about sexual assault and harassment?
  - a. Is this more often, less often, or about the same as when you first got to campus?
  - b. How has the message changed?
    - i. Is it working?
  - c. When is the most appropriate time for these conversations?



**Part 6: Concluding Comments**

- We are just about ready to wrap up, but before we finish, are there any last comments you wanted to add to the discussion?
- What should the SAPR Program look like 5 years from now?

We want to thank you for your time today in this focus group session. As I mentioned at the beginning, we will treat all of your comments anonymously. There is no attribution to any of you for the specific comments you made today. Please also respect that non-attribution when you leave here today. Our goal is to provide the best data possible, and you have helped us greatly today with your comments and insights.

One last comment – on the last page of the participant handout you will see a list of resources available to you if you would like to follow up with us or have any questions. That is yours to keep. It also lists Academy resources if you would like to talk further to someone about this study or any experiences you might have had with unwanted gender-related behaviors.

Thank you again for your participation.



**Appendix E.  
Student Handout**



Office of People Analytics (OPA)



**2017 Service Academy Gender  
Relations Focus Groups:  
[Academy Name]**

**Handout for [Cadet or Midshipmen]  
Participants**

**2017 SERVICE ACADEMY GENDER RELATIONS  
FOCUS GROUPS: [ACADEMY NAME]  
HANDOUT FOR [CADET OR MIDSHIPMEN] PARTICIPANTS**

**Purpose**

We have asked you to be here with us to help us understand issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response. You might recall that in the spring of last year students at your Academy were asked to participate in a paper and pencil survey on these topics. This year, focus groups are being conducted to provide additional information to DoD and Academy leadership. Similar focus groups are being conducted at all three DoD Service Academies as well as the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

This is a voluntary focus group. The Academy staff member who invited you to participate in this session should have informed you that we would be discussing gender-related issues, including sexual assault and harassment, and asked if you were willing to participate. If you prefer not to sit in on this focus group, you are free to leave or to sit quietly while others participate.

- Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to conduct an annual assessment cycle of surveys and focus groups in alternating years on gender issues at each of the Academies. This is an opportunity for you to share your perceptions and recommendations directly with senior leaders.

### Ground Rules for Discussion

Thank you in advance for participating in this important focus group. We will follow a few ground rules for the focus group:

- Please respect each other's opinions. We know you will have different perspectives on issues covered in this focus group. We want to hear ALL views.
- There are no right or wrong statements or opinions.
- If you need to leave during the session, please do so in a quiet manner, so as not to disrupt the group.
- I will lead the discussion and our recorder will be helping us to take notes. We will record comments but will not record names or other identifying information. My role as facilitator is to keep the session moving and to guide the discussion. This might mean that I will move on to another topic in the interest of time.
- This is a non-attribution session. Although we are taking notes on your comments and suggestions, to the extent allowed by law OPA does not publish nor share anything outside this room that can be attributed to any one of you specifically. In some instances, OPA may receive requests for the unedited comments collected at these sessions; this information will only be provided to the extent required by law. We ask your cooperation in protecting the privacy of the comments made within this session by not saying anything that would identify you or other participants. For example, do not state your name, your roommate's name, or your squadron or company identification. In addition, we also ask that you do not discuss the focus group proceedings after you leave. Additional information about protecting your anonymity is shown in the box below.

Preserving the privacy and confidentiality of focus group participants is a fundamental principle for any successful data collection program, and the Department of Defense (DoD) Office of People Analytics (OPA) strives to maintain and protect the identity of every individual who participates in any of our data collection efforts. To accomplish this goal, OPA uses procedures and protocols that protect respondent confidentiality to the extent permitted by all federal laws and statutes.

Participation in this focus group is voluntary; however, maximum participation is encouraged so that data will be complete and representative. The data collection procedures maintain the anonymity of all participants; no one from OPA will know who has been selected by their respective Academies and no record will be made of those who participate in any given session. Further, no comments will be kept in the written notes that could be linked to any individual participant. The risk to you is accidental or unintentional disclosure of any identifying data you provide during the session or other disclosures required by law. However, OPA has a number of policies and procedures preserve the anonymity of survey data and all potentially identifying information has been removed.

There will be no collection or use of personally identifiable information (PII), and no one will be able to determine the responses of any given individual. Access to the unedited record of comments is limited to OPA analysts and contractors under their direct supervision. In limited circumstances where an organization such as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) is performing an audit or analysis, the unedited record of comments can be shared to the extent disclosure is required by law. The organization must agree in writing to protect the data and subscribe to all provisions of the Privacy Act, including destroying the data when the specific audit or analysis is concluded. In addition, no data can be used to contact a focus group participant or link responses back to a participant. Access to the edited record of comments where potentially identifying information has been removed is limited to Academy senior leaders and staff working in sexual assault response and prevention activities, or as otherwise required by law. Selected comments that have had all identifiers removed will be included in the final report to illustrate findings. Finally, no audio or video recording will be done in order to further protect your anonymity.



### Discussion Resources

On the next several pages are results from the 2016 survey that we will use as part of the discussion today. I will call your attention to the specific item as we reach that part of the discussion.

Please note that the results I will share with you come from the 2016 Service Academy Gender Relations Survey. This survey was conducted in the spring of 2016 with results reported to your Academy and Service leadership as well as the House and Senate Armed Services Committees in February 2017.

To assure statistically reliability of the survey results, we surveyed all of the cadets. The full report is available on the Defense Manpower Data Center web site at: [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp\\_surveys.jsp](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_surveys.jsp) Select the 2016 SAGR Overview Report.

**2016 Survey Results: Unwanted Sexual Contact**

Unwanted sexual contact consists of a range of unwanted behaviors including unwanted sexual touching, attempted sex, and completed sex.

**Unwanted Sexual Contact Rates for [ACADEMY] Women**

[Table for Women at the Academy]

**Unwanted Sexual Contact Rates for [ACADEMY] Men**

[Table for Men at the Academy]

**Number of Incidents Reported in 2015-2016**

Type of Report	Number of Reports
Sexual Assault – Unrestricted	xx
Sexual Assault – Restricted	xx
Sexual Harassment – Formal Complaints	xx

**Multiple Offenses and Number of Offenders**

Of those who experienced USC since June 2015:	Women	Men
Experienced more than one incident	xx%	xx%
Same offenders were involved	xx%	xx%

## Definitions

### Sexual Harassment:

“Involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person’s job, pay, or career, or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person, or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.

This definition emphasizes that workplace conduct, to be actionable as ‘abusive work environment’ harassment, need not result in concrete psychological harm to the victim, but rather need only be so severe or pervasive that a reasonable person would perceive, and the victim does perceive, the environment as hostile or offensive”

### Sexual Assault:

DoD defines sexual assault as “intentional sexual contact characterized by use of force, threats, intimidation, or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent”

### Unwanted Sexual Contact:

Experiencing any of the following intentional sexual contacts that were against your will or occurred when you did not or could not consent in which someone:

- Sexually touched you (for example, intentional touching of genitalia, buttocks, [breasts if you are a woman]), or made you sexually touch them?
- Attempted to make you have sexual intercourse, but was not successful?
- Made you have sexual intercourse?
- Attempted to make you perform or receive oral sex, anal sex, or penetration by a finger or object, but was not successful?
- Made you perform or receive oral sex, anal sex, or penetration by a finger or object?

### Retaliation:

DoD policies specifically prohibit retaliation. Retaliation, as defined by the Department, includes two distinct types of actions:

- Taking or threatening to take an adverse personnel action, or withholding or threatening to withhold a favorable personnel action, with respect to a member of the Armed Forces because the member reported a criminal offense; or is believed to have reported a criminal offense [if asked for an example, for cadets/midshipmen, actions that affect a cadet/midshipman promotion; a disciplinary or other corrective action; a transfer or reassignment to another company/squadron; a negative military performance evaluation; a negative decision on training opportunities; referral for mental health evaluations, or any other significant negative change in duties or responsibilities inconsistent with their current situation].
- Ostracism and such acts of maltreatment, as designated by the Secretary of the Military Department, committed by peers of a member of the Armed Forces or by concerned other persons because the member reported a criminal offense or is believed to have reported a criminal offense.

We appreciate your participation in this focus group. In the event you would like to discuss issues related to the focus group with someone from OPA during (or after) our visit to the [Academy], please contact Kristin Williams at 571-372-1033.

If you wish to provide feedback regarding the focus group process or the focus group content, please send us an e-mail at: SA-Survey@mail.mil. If you know of others who might like to contact a member of the DMDC team, please share this information with them. In April 2011, the Department of Defense launched the DoD Safe Helpline to provide confidential, live, one-on-one expert advice to victims of sexual assault. Available 24/7, users can click, call or text to access Safe Helpline services:

**CLICK:** Logging on to [www.SafeHelpline.org](http://www.SafeHelpline.org) allows users to receive live, one-on-one confidential help with a trained professional through a secure instant-messaging format. The website also provides vital information about recovering from and reporting sexual assault.

**CALL:** Calling the telephone hotline 877-995-5247 allows users to speak with trained Safe Helpline staff for access to resources and support. Safe Helpline staff can also transfer callers to installation or base Sexual Assault Response Coordinators (SARCs)/On-call SAPR Victim Advocates (VAs), civilian rape crisis centers or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

**TEXT:** Texting their location to 55-247 (inside the U.S.) or 202-470-5546 (outside the U.S.) allows users to receive automated contact information for the SARC at their installation or base.

If you feel uncomfortable or uneasy after participating in the focus group, and/or if you are a survivor of sexual assault, or have experienced sexual harassment or stalking, we strongly encourage you to Contact the Sexual Assault Response Team:

**Academy Specific Information**

**Academy Specific Information**





**Appendix F.  
Faculty Handout**





**Office of People Analytics (OPA)**



**2017 Service Academy Gender  
Relations Focus Groups:  
[Academy Name]**

**Handout for Faculty, Athletic Staff,  
Military Cadre Participants**

**2017 SERVICE ACADEMY GENDER RELATIONS  
FOCUS GROUPS: [ACADEMY NAME]  
HANDOUT FOR FACULTY, ATHLETIC STAFF,  
MILITARY CADRE PARTICIPANTS**

**Purpose**

We have asked you to be here with us to help us understand issues of sexual assault and sexual harassment prevention and response. You might recall that in the spring of last year students at your Academy were asked to participate in a paper and pencil survey on these topics. This year, focus groups are being conducted to provide additional information to DoD and Academy leadership. Similar focus groups are being conducted at all three DoD Service Academies as well as the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

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- Congress directed the Secretary of Defense to conduct an annual assessment cycle of surveys and focus groups in alternating years on gender issues at each of the Academies. This is an opportunity for you and students to share your perceptions and recommendations directly with senior leaders.
- This is the third year we have invited members of the faculty, athletic and activity staffs, and military cadre to participate. Because you interact with the students, we believe you are in a position to share valuable insights with us on these important issues. We do not want to discuss any specific cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment. We do want to discuss issues in general so we can provide guidance to leadership to create the best environment possible for the students.

### Ground Rules for Discussion

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- There are no right or wrong statements or opinions.
- If you need to leave during the session, please do so in a quiet manner, so as not to disrupt the group.
- I will lead the discussion and our recorder will be helping us to take notes. We will record comments but will not record names or other identifying information. My role as facilitator is to keep the session moving and to guide the discussion. This might mean that I will move on to another topic in the interest of time.
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**Academy Specific Information**





**Office of People Analytics  
(OPA)**

